THE SUBLIMITY OF VIOLENCE: KANT AND THE AESTHETIC RESPONSE TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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Kant identified in the "spectators'" enthusiastic response to the French Revolution the clear sign of a moral disposition in humankind. Following Hannah Arendt's classic interpretation, but departing from it in important respects, I attempt to show in this paper that the "spectatorial" account of Kant's view of the French Revolution makes sense only if it is understood in terms of a subject's aesthetic response to objects of natural sublimity, and only if this aesthetic experience is instrumentalized for purposes of moral education.

Kant's private approval of the French Revolution is not matched by a corresponding conceptual justification in his legal philosophy of the revolutionary principle as an instrument of social and political change. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, *Perpetual Peace*, as well as in *Theory and Practice* he explicitly rejects the right to use political violence, even against a regime that is not in conformity with the principle of right (*rechtsmässig*). For Kant, all acts of active resistance are illegal means to effect transformations in the political organization of society, and this holds even under the most severe circumstances of political oppression. There is no recourse in Kant to substantive principles of justice capable of circumventing the strict procedural rules that qualify actions as right (*rechtlich*).[1] Furthermore, the prohibition against political violence covers all other extra-legal grounds of appeal, including moral norms or exceptions to such norms in cases of natural necessity, even though Kant is alleged by some to have derived the universal principle of right from the categorical imperative, which should allow such grounds, at least in principle.[2]

Yet, Kant also contends in the *Idea for a Universal History* that political violence can be a vehicle for progress (IUH 50/8:27), and in the *Contest of Faculties* he went so far as to identify in the "spectator's'" enthusiastic response to the French Revolution—an event of incontestable violence—the clear sign of a moral disposition in humankind (CF 182/7:85).[3] How can one reconcile these two positions?[4] In the following I set out to show that the "spectatorial" account of Kant's view of the French Revolution, originally formulated by Hannah Arendt, may provide us with a solution to this problem.

But the solution can work only if we significantly revise Arendt's interpretation on the strength of a different reading of Kant. The proposed alternative would require that we understand Kant's reaction to revolutionary violence in terms of the aesthetic response of the spectators to objects of natural sublimity, an experience that also fosters the moral education of the individual and of humankind. If we adopt this interpretation, Kant's arguments against political violence are no longer incompatible with his belief that sympathy for the French Revolution offers evidence of humanity's moral disposition. One could both reject political violence on moral and legal grounds and react to it in ways that enhance private and, perhaps, even public morality provided that violent political action is assimilated to a non-intentional natural event, and the response to it in aesthetic contemplation yields reflective judgments of sublimity.

Here is the paragraph in the *Contest* that causes so much controversy:

> The revolution...may be so filled with misery and atrocities that no right-thinking man would ever decide to make the experiment again... But I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm, although the very utterance of this sympathy was fraught with danger. It cannot therefore have been caused by anything other than a moral disposition in the human race (CF 182/7:85; Kant's emphasis).

Following Hannah Arendt, commentators usually interpret this fragment as introducing a distinction between the perspective of the spectator and that of the agent.[5] Arendt controversially argued in a series of posthumously published lectures that the key to understanding Kant's political theory is provided by his *Critique of Judgment*, which makes explicit the hidden or "repressed" communicational premises on which the former rests. In her reading, Kant's preoccupation with the notion of sociability late in his life is met in his critical philosophy by the notion of a *sensus communis* that we all presuppose in our reflective judgments. Claiming subjective universality for judgments of taste requires that aesthetic pleasure be communicable, and communication of what is highly subjective presupposes a shared faculty. This idea is in turn linked to the principle of publicity that must underwrite all political maxims in a lawful society. Communicability, therefore, is the true compact of mankind, and not the social contract, which is an idea of reason that still requires external enforcement.[6]

Arendt's position is that when we deliberate publicly we cannot avoid adopting the perspective of the community of enlightened and disinterested agents, which must inform, without determining, however, all our practical judgments and maxims for action. The perspective of the "spectator," therefore, reveals the intersubjective presuppositions of any meaningful deliberation that yields judgments with practical relevance. And, Arendt argues, this is Kant's own perspective when praising the "sublime spectacle" of the French Revolution and distinguishing the standpoint of the spectator from that of the actor. What is allowed the former, rooting for justice in the wake of an event that seemed to achieve it, cannot be permitted to the latter, that is, violently uprooting a lawful regime in order to make room for a more just condition.[7] If we accept this distinction, Kant's legal arguments against change through political violence are no longer inconsistent with his belief that our sympathy for the French Revolution reveals the moral potential of humankind.

The wider theoretical context that informs Arendt's interpretation makes her reading of Kant sufficiently interesting to persuade critics of its legitimacy. And, at least one of the central elements of this interpretation, i.e., the distinction between the two perspectives, withstands any scrutiny. However, Arendt's appeal to communicability and the *sensus communis* to justify this distinction, partly motivated by the disproportionate methodological weight of reflective judgment in her reconstruction of Kant's political philosophy, is less convincing. Furthermore, there are some problems with the textual evidence for Arendt's interpretation of the *Contest*, and in order to see what they are and what they entail, we will have to take a closer look at Kant's actual explanation.

Kant says that the sympathy of the onlookers was caused by a moral disposition within the human race. In the next paragraph he identifies the two elements that together make up this cause: on the objective side, the right of self-legislation, or the condition of right as such; on the subjective, the will to submit freely to juridical laws of one's own making, that is, human rationality as applied to legal relations. But, this immediately raises a question: why is sympathy needed as an additional sign of the presence of this moral disposition, if right and the will to obey its principles were already present in the outcome of the revolution, signalling the exact same thing —either, on the objective side, in the juridical make-up of the new regime, or, on the subjective side, in the propensity for lawfulness of the liberated citizens and their rulers?

One possible answer, widely accepted by commentators, is that Kant did not wish to legitimize the unlawful transfer of power and the violent means

that achieved it. Thus, he chose to identify as the source of moral disposition only the new political ideals in their impact on the mind of the non-participants.[8] In the following paragraph, however, Kant adds three new ideas that together throw some doubt on this explanation. First, he says that enthusiasm, which is phenomenally akin to passion (but, unlike passion, is not ethically blameworthy), *along with* the right of self-legislation and the attitude of lawfulness, "[are] always directed exclusively toward the ideal, particularly that which is purely moral (such as the concept of right)" (CF 183/9:86). Second, he localizes this enthusiasm in the revolutionaries themselves, not in the spectators, and suggests that it is similar to the moral frisson produced by fighting for what one takes to be a noble cause: "Even the old military aristocracy's concept of honour (which is analogous to enthusiasm) vanished before the arms (*Waffen*) of those who had fixed their gaze on the rights of the people to which they belonged, and who regarded themselves as its protectors."[9] Third, he allows that the sympathy of the spectators is for the "exaltation" of the revolutionaries, which seems to be Kant's synonym for *their* enthusiasm.

These three new elements indicate that Kant actually speaks of two kinds of enthusiasm, the spectators' and the actors', each seemingly providing evidence of the moral disposition of humankind, albeit in two different ways. But, what kind of explanation could possibly justify this tacit distinction? One plausible answer could be that by attempting to distinguish the spectators' enthusiasm from the actors', Kant tried to show that even those who did not rebel against their monarch (in this case, the Prussians) because of the intrinsic republicanism and lawfulness of their monarchic rule, still shared, as spectators, in the moral disposition of humankind, whose other effect was the actors' enthusiasm for the realization of justice. And, this seems to be the tone of the footnote on the same page in the *Contest* where Kant defends himself against charges of Jacobinism. But, this explanation would still place the sign of equality between the will to live in justice and the will to engage in violence to achieve justice, which is unacceptable for Kant. Moreover, if the latter were also a legitimate moral cause, one cannot help but wonder why Kant took such pains to distinguish so carefully the spectator from the actor.

Another explanation would be that the spectators' sympathy for the enthusiasm of the actors provides direct evidence of the spectators' moral disposition and, thus, indirect proof of the moral disposition of humankind, whereas the actors' enthusiasm does not, even though they as well as some of the spectators seemed to believe otherwise. The object of the actors' enthusiasm is the ideal of justice, regardless of how it is achieved, whereas the object

of the spectators' is only the actors' enthusiasm or "exaltation." The difference between this interpretation and the "official" one, according to which right and the will to justice alone account for the sympathy of the spectators for the Revolution, is that the former allows one to eliminate the problem of the moral incompatibility between means and ends, and the related ethical problem raised by privately sympathizing with morally dubious political actions. This, however, requires that purposive revolutionary action be reduced to blind natural causality, which is the vehicle of progress according to the natural-teleological theory articulated in the *Idea*, and that the enthusiasm of the spectators be for this natural force of moral change, whose outward phenomenal expression is the "exaltation" of the actors.

In this interpretation, revolutionary movements are natural events of no intrinsic moral relevance, and the participants just a blind mass of pathologically excited people.[10] Strictly speaking, there are no persons to whom one could impute the consequences of actions.[11] This allows Kant to endorse fully the positive legal results of the French Revolution on the basis of his procedural conception of justice (according to which the revolutionary authority is legitimate regardless of how it came into being) and, at the same time, forbid the deliberate undertaking of such actions by individuals and organized political groups. Thus, the "cunning of nature" or asocial sociability offers evidence that the human race is politically progressing, whereas the spectators' enthusiasm for the exaltation of the revolutionary crowd is proof that political progress is accompanied by moral progress.

This would make for a convenient solution to a vexing problem if one could find some evidence that it was Kant's, or that Kant could have endorsed it, and if the evidence also explained how the spectators' enthusiasm might be dissociated from the objectives of those whose exaltation caused it. I believe that the evidence is provided by Kant's theory of aesthetic response to natural sublimity, which also clarifies how the spectator can react to, without, however, approving of, a violent event in a way that reveals her moral disposition.

Interesting as they are, Arendt's ideas about the mediating function of the reflective judgment do not dramatically alter the standard understanding of Kant's legal philosophy.[12] They also do little to advance the analysis of the link between violence and the enthusiasm for the French Revolution. Yet, there is another sense in which Kant's aesthetics can illuminate this connection. Arendt says in a different context that revolutions are speechless.[13] The revolution is a fleeting event of particular violence that cannot be subjected to discursive reasoning. Therefore, its meaning cannot be captured by the tools

of traditional political theory. No analysis of social or economic causes, individual and collective psychology, political institutions or historical events can explain the outburst of mass energy that defines revolutionary movements. The revolutionary phenomenon as such is ineffable.

Kant's aesthetic theory also deals with the ineffable. Gadamer, for instance, criticized the neo-Kantian subjectivization of aesthetics for being unable to overcome the fragmentation of aesthetic experience (*Erlebnis*). Since the judgment of beauty is based on acts of contemplation, and because contemplation is a fleeting and indeterminate inner representation, the complete experience of the work of art (*Erfahrung*) is similarly reduced to a self-referential state of the mind that cannot lay any claim to truth.[14] Now, given that, according to Arendt, the revolutionary phenomenon resists discourse and cannot be captured as an object by any theory, and since, *pace* Gadamer, Kant's aesthetic theory similarly devours its objects in the "fulgurations" of aesthetic consciousness, one wonders if the former could not make the perfect object for the latter. Kant's various references to the sublimity of the revolution (and his other references to the sublimity of war) seem to justify this methodological conjecture.

Unlike the determinate judgments of either cognition or moral practice, the reflective judgment, which lies at the centre of Kant's aesthetic theory, "merely reflects" on the presentation of an object. Its principle, the form of purposiveness for our cognitive powers of the object of reflection, is subjectively teleological. It presents the empirical unity of nature as if it exhibited a purpose, except that the purpose is unavailable for cognition. It is what Kant calls purposiveness without a purpose (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*). The principle, therefore, is "one that reflective judgment gives as a law, but only to itself" (C3 19/5:180). And, the actual object of the judgment is not the object of nature, or the artefact whose presentation is submitted to the mind in reflection, but the feeling of pleasure we experience when we refer the form of the presentation to the harmony of our cognitive powers, the understanding and the imagination. The pleasure is for the normativity of our mental state with respect to the presented object.[15]

Reflective judgments are of two kinds, judgments of taste (or beauty) and judgments of the sublime. Although the judgment of the sublime shares its a priori basis with the judgment of taste, it is also much different from it. Whereas the object of beauty is bounded and its form can be grasped by the imagination, the sublime is unbounded. It is precisely this unboundedness or formlessness of the object that triggers the feeling of pleasure. For this reason,

we no longer refer the object to the indeterminate power of the understanding, as fit for cognition through concepts, but to an indeterminate concept of reason.

The quality of liking the object is also different. In a judgment of taste, the play of the imagination and the understanding immediately leads to a feeling of "life's being furthered," whereas in the sublime this feeling is arrived at indirectly. It is preceded by the "feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces, followed immediately by an outpouring of them that is all the stronger" (C3 98/5:245). The feeling is one of seriousness, closer to the moral feelings of respect or admiration, which makes the pleasure negative in quality, a repression of one's sensible nature in the face of the formlessness of the sublime object.[16]

But, the sublime has another effect as well. The sublime object is counter-purposive for our cognitive powers, which is why the experience of sublimity is commonly regarded as a species of violence to the imagination. The impression of inadequacy in representation, which translates into an acknowledgment of our own cognitive inadequacy, is caused by the inability of our representational powers to grasp the totality of the sublime. It is this feeling of impotence that we call sublime, but only to the extent that we are able to overcome it by referring the initial displeasure to an "idea containing a higher purposiveness" that could adequately appraise it (C3 99/5:246). Displeasure is now replaced by the pleasure we take in the ability of the mind to overcome its limitations, which corresponds not to humiliation, submission, and self-repression, but elation (*das Erhabene*).[17] The sublime, therefore, elevates us above our cognitive condition.

Of the two kinds of sublime, the mathematical and the dynamic, the second may help us explain the spectators' reaction to the Revolution. The dynamically sublime presents nature as a might (*Macht*) that is superior to any human power. Yet, in contemplating we must not feel that it has any dominance (*Gewalt*) over us. The object of nature must be presented as capable of arousing fear, where fear is the psychological condition corresponding to our recognition that we are in no position to resist its might. But, the fear must not affect us directly. If we are fearful, what determines the judgment is the empirical component in the representation of the threat, and the judgment will be determinative, or one of cause and effect. Moreover, when we escape something fearful, we experience joy, which corresponds to what is agreeable in sensation and, therefore, cannot be the product of reflective judgment. Thus,

the experience of the sublime must be one of "fearfulness without fear" (C3 119/5:260).

Which objects may we call (dynamically) sublime? Here are Kant's examples: tempests, thunderstorms, hurricanes, erupting volcanoes, earthquakes, "deep gorges with raging streams in them," the ocean at storm, the high waterfall of a mighty river. Most of these are instances of mindless natural violence that disrupt the civil tranquility of life and remind us of the uncontrollable powers in the universe. There are only two other examples in the third *Critique* that do not refer to natural events: religious feelings caused by the idea of an almighty being and admiration for the warrior who overcomes his fear. As Kant says in relation to the latter, "Even war has something sublime about it, if it is carried out in an orderly way and with respect for the sanctity of the citizens' rights" (C3 122/5:263).

How could Kant consistently claim that war is the most horrible of all evils (as he does in *Perpetual Peace*) and yet appreciate the warrior figure and war itself as displaying sublimity? There are two issues that need to be distinguished here. First, there is a weak analogy that Kant uses for purposes of illustration between the admiration we feel for the courage of the (virtuous!) warrior who overcomes obstacles, which "reveals to us that his mind cannot be subdued by danger" (C3 121/5:262), and what happens to us in experiences of sublimity. With respect to the latter, Kant says that "[T]he soul's fortitude [is raised] above its usual middle range, [which] allows us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a different kind, and which gives us the courage [to believe] that we could be a match to nature's seeming omnipotence" (C3 120/5:261). The same analogy seems to have been employed in the quoted paragraph from the *Contest*, where Kant likened the exaltation of the crowd to the military's concept of honour.

Second, the representation of war itself is judged in terms of the category of sublimity, which could only be explained if Kant understood war, or at least the destructive force unleashed by it, as a mindless natural phenomenon contained within the limitations of "order" and "respect for rights." We judge war sublime just as we judge the thunderstorm or the earthquake when they are presented to us in the imagination: disinterestedly, from a distance, either geographical or historical, and with fearfulness without fear. In his other references to war, Kant similarly presents human agency as collective or mass agency: violent, blind, and irrational, a position which is partially consistent with his view of the "cunning of nature" in the *Idea*. *Perpetual Peace* clarifies this point as follows: "War is bad in that it makes more evil people than it

takes away. So much for what *nature does for its own end* with respect to the *human race as a class of animals*" (PP 334/8:365; my emphasis).

Now, based on Kant's description of the French Revolution in the *Contest* as the deed of exalted or enthusiastic people, I suggest that Kant's aesthetic representation of it (admittedly, a very romantic one) presupposes a similar understanding of collective violence. The revolution, as Kant appears to have imagined it from the geographical and historical distance of 1790's Königsberg, could be described as a short-lived natural event, a spontaneous mass-act similar to natural disasters, whose outward expression was the revolutionaries' "exaltation" and their "enthusiasm exclusively directed toward the ideal of justice" (CF 183/9:86). A similar vision animates Kant's natural teleology in the *Idea for a Universal History*, where the engine of moral progress is humanity's unconscious propensity for conflict. For this reason, the revolution's unfortunate consequences cannot be judged morally or legally, just as one cannot condemn violent natural events for their destructiveness. This further allowed Kant to distinguish the phenomenon of mass violence triggered by the storming of the Bastille from the Terror, or the true (and morally condemnable) revolution, according to the *Rechtslehre* (RL 464n/6:320-2n; also R 8048), which consisted of a series of acts of violence that were deliberate, technologically enhanced (the guillotine), guided by a clear political interest, and instrumentalized accordingly. Only the former of these two types of violence channels the energy of a natural force. The latter is evil wrapped up in a semblance of justice (RL 464n/6:322n).

Finally, and completing the analogy between the sublimity of war and the sublimity of the revolution, the moral and legal safeguards Kant places on the permissible context of heroic war waging ("order," "respect for the rights of the citizens," on the one hand, and the presence of a moral motivation in the courageous warrior, on the other) seem to have been replaced in the context of the aesthetic response to the French Revolution by two, functionally similar, devices. On the one hand, there is the object of the revolutionaries' exaltation, or the ideal of justice that needs to be realized; on the other hand, and revealing a methodological circularity of which Kant seems to have been unaware, there is that exaltation itself. The circularity mentioned above need not bother us. Exaltation may well be an intrinsic feature of the (moral) psychology of the warrior or revolutionary, but it is an extrinsic feature of aesthetic contemplation that plays no substantive role in the constitution of the experience of sublimity. As well, the ideal of justice cannot by itself determine the quality of the spectators' aesthetic response to the sublimity of natural violence, which

means that the present interpretation of Kant's spectatorial theory is not undermined in any significant manner by the imperfections of what could be an overextended analogy.

If it does not seem too far-fetched to analyze the French Revolution as a phenomenon of natural sublimity, what could possibly account for Kant's claim that the spectator's reaction to it provides evidence of her (and our) *moral* disposition? Again, the analysis of natural sublimity gives us a clear indication. The experience of the sublime is not directed at the presentation of the object, as in the experience of beauty. The sublime is strictly in us. In judging something sublime, we overcome the negative feeling of displeasure that is caused by the inability of the imagination to present the formless object to the cognitive power. The imagination is strained to its limit and, when it fails to produce an appropriate pure schema, it defers to reason, which supplies it with an idea. It is this presentation through indeterminate concepts of reason that causes the feeling of pleasure, a feeling no longer based on the form of the object, but on the mind's ability to raise itself above its cognitive inadequacy. For this reason, "Sublime is what we like…directly" (C3 127/5:267), which provides, Kant argues, further proof of the mind's supersensible vocation. The representational impotence of the imagination prods the mind to "subjectively *think* nature itself in its totality as the exhibition of something supersensible, without our being able to bring this exhibition about *objectively*" (C3 128/5:268; Kant's emphasis). In other words, sublimity is an experience of self-transcendence, taking us from our empirical self-representation in the imagination to the exhibition of our potential for rational thinking in feeling. This potential indicates our capacity for morality in a way that is even more revealing than the moral symbolization afforded by judgments of beauty.

But there is also a second sense in which the sublime provides evidence of our capacity for morality. Kant's discussion of the sublime indicates that the feeling of indirect pleasure is phenomenally similar to respect, or the intellectual feeling that accompanies (or *is*) self-determination by the moral law (which is why Kant often uses these two words interchangeably in his moral writings).[18] Kant says, "The judging strains the imagination because it is based on a feeling that the mind has a vocation that wholly transcends the domain of nature (namely, moral feeling), and it is with regard to this feeling that we judge the presentation of the object subjectively purposive" (C3 128/5:268). The moral law never manifests itself except in its subjective component, as respect, a feeling of having been elevated above the humiliation we experience when confronted with the majesty of self-legislation.[19] And, the

same feeling accompanies the presentation of the sublime object: "[C]onsidered from the aesthetic side (i.e. in reference to sensibility), the liking is negative…but considered from the intellectual side it is positive and connected with a [moral] interest" (C3 131/5:271). The only difference between the two is that respect follows (or *is*) the voluntary submission to the moral law, whereas in the experience of the sublime the feeling mediates the referral of the presentation of the sublime object to the indeterminate concept of reason. Thus, "if we judge aesthetically the moral good…we must present it…as sublime, so that it will arouse more a feeling of respect…" (C3 132/5:271). Furthermore, given that this feeling is phenomenally similar, if not the same, with moral feeling, one has the "obligation…to *cultivate* it and to strengthen it through wonder at its inscrutable source" (TL 529/6:400; Kant's emphasis). This is precisely what happens to the disinterested "spectator" in the *Contest*: she becomes aware of the supersensible source of her moral feeling.

The evidence presented so far suggests that our response to the "sublime spectacle" of the French Revolution reveals the presence of an innate moral disposition. But, is this what Kant had in mind in the *Contest* when he declared that the revolution is met with a sympathy that "borders almost on enthusiasm?" Apparently, yes. Here is how Kant defined enthusiasm in the *Critique of Judgment*: "If the idea of the good is accompanied by affect [as its effect], this [affect] is called *enthusiasm*. This mental state seems to be sublime…" (C3 132/5:272; Kant's emphasis). Enthusiasm turns out to be the empirical counterpart of the intellectual feeling of elation in aesthetic pleasure or moral judging, which reinforces the claim that Kant must have understood the spectators' reaction to the French Revolution in aesthetic terms.

One final issue needs to be addressed at this point: how can aesthetic feeling be instrumentalized for moral purposes? Kant's various discussions of moral education may provide a clue. Kant's notorious refusal to endorse revolutionary action as an instrument of change in his political writings may be explained by the fact that he sees legal obedience as the subjectively necessary condition for the fulfillment of a process of moral education of the individual (*Bildung*) and the species (*Erziehung*). The goal of this process, indeed, the final purpose of creation (*Endzweck*), is the emergence of a moralized world within the world of sense (C3 323/5:435), as revealed by the imperfect duty to realize the highest good (C2 228/5:110).[20]

The capacity to obey laws of one's own creation is the product of what Kant calls the "culture of discipline" (*Zucht* or *Disziplin*), which is the first

stage of *Bildung* and a prerequisite for the development of reason as the sole principle of moral self-determination. Discipline here is what Kant in other contexts calls "ethical ascetics" (TL 597/6:484). Its object is "how to put into practice and *cultivate* the capacity for as well as the will to virtue" (TL 539/6:412; Kant's emphasis). By curbing the inclinations, discipline makes room for the development of our humanity and, at the same time, it facilitates "our education for our highest vocation," or morality (C3 319/5:432). Although it cannot produce individual morality by itself, discipline "makes us civilized (*gesittet*) enough for life in society" (C3 321/5:433). Now, legal obedience, according to *Perpetual Peace* (PP 340, 343n/8:372, 8:376n), seems to play a similar role in ethics. It recommends restraint, at the possible price of unhappiness and physical suffering, in order to create the subjectively necessary conditions for the emergence of moral lawfulness.[21]

The other, positive aspect of *Bildung* is the "culture of skill," or *Geschicklichkeit*, which is the ability to adopt as one's own those ends that are appropriate for moral education and, thus, conducive to moral self-determination. Keeping in line with the interpretation pursued above, I suggest that, as a component of aesthetic cultivation, the spectators' aesthetic response to the French Revolution may be assimilated, in the institutionalized forms that structure public imagination (the fine arts, literature, or the "moral catechism" of school pedagogy), to the culture of skill. This would allow Kant to reject rebellion, either on legal grounds, or on the basis of his negative moral pedagogy (the culture of discipline), and, at the same time, instrumentalize an aesthetically enhanced historical representation of it in ways that may also encourage the moral education of the individual (*Bildung*) and of humankind (*Erziehung*).

There is always the risk of using Kant's theory of aesthetic response to the sublimity of natural violence to justify the morally indefensible. The recent urban uprisings in France, for instance, seem to have reinforced the popular belief that riots and other acts of gratuitous violence may also be explained in terms of the excitement generated by the aesthetic response of the participants to images of material destruction.[22] Although the psychological causality presupposed by such explanations may turn out to be empirically verifiable (and there is a respectable tradition in European social psychology, stretching from Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde to Serge Moscovici via Wilhelm Reich and others, that purports to do just that), the attempt to derive ethical meaning from it would not meet Kant's approval. There is nothing morally uplifting in perpetrating violence for "aesthetic" thrills, and Kant is very clear

about this. Unlike the disinterested spectator, the member of the violent crowd is "manically" pursuing the object of his "fanatical" exaltation, the ideal of justice, in the various political guises in which justice may present itself to him (C3 136/5:275). And, the willingness of decent people to join in mass actions that may take them in catastrophic directions could also be accounted for, as Kant himself suggests, in terms of a pathological change in their disposition, from aesthetic contemplation to exalted action. The same conceptual apparatus that helps to explain the moral potential of a specific kind of aesthetic response may also be used to illustrate the psychological mechanism of social pathologies. However, these two subjects, aesthetic response to natural violence and violent action caused by representations of destruction, could not be more dissimilar.

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[1] Christine Korsgaard, "Taking the Law into Our Own Hands" in *Reclaiming the History of Ethics. Essays for John Rawls*, eds. Andrews Reath, Barbara Herman, and Christine Korsgaard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 299.

[2] Onora O'Neill, "Kant and the Social Contract Tradition" in *Kant actuel: hommage à Pierre Laberge*, eds. François Duchesneau, Guy Lafrance, Claude Piché (Montréal and Paris: Bellarmin and Vrin, 2000), 197.

[3] Works by Kant cited in this paper: "The Metaphysics of Morals, The Doctrine of Right" (hereafter abridged RL) and "The Doctrine of Virtue" (TL), "On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, But It Is of No Use in Practice" (TP), "Toward Perpetual Peace" (PP), "Critique of Practical Reason" (C2), all in I. Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, tr. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *The Critique of Judgment* (C3), tr. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987); "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" (IUH) and "The Contest of Faculties" (CF), both in I. Kant, *Political Writings*, tr. H. B. Nisbet [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 (1971)]; *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Rel), tr. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); "*Reflexionen zur Rechtsphilosophie*" (R), *Gesammelte Schriften* (Akademie Ausgabe), Bd. 19 (Leipzig and Berlin: de Gruyter, 1904-). All parenthetical references are to the English translations, followed by the pagination of the *Akademie* edition, except for the references to the "Reflections," which refer to their own numbering.

[4] Howard Williams is one of many, who have raised the problem of inconsistency. See his *Kant's Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 211–13.

[5] Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 15.

[6] *Ibid.*, 10, 15, 40. Henry Allison also compares the notion of universal voice in Kant with Rousseau's general will in his *Kant's Theory of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 107.

[7] Arendt, 74.

[8] The fact that Kant did not consider the French Revolution an actual revolution [but rather a succession of reforms (R 8018, 8048, 8055)], at least not until the execution of the king (according to one footnote in the *Rechtslehre*), is irrelevant in this semantic context. Kant was writing retrospectively and had no choice but to accept the popular representation of the facts.

[9] The reference to *Waffen* provides an even clearer indication that Kant means here the *fighting* revolutionaries, and not the ideologists of the revolution or its proselytizers.

[10] The former idea is supported by many, including, but not limited to, Lewis White Beck, "Kant and the Right of Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* XXXII, no. 1 (January-March 1971): 419, Robert Spaemann, "*Kants Kritik des Widerstandsrechts*" in *Materialien zu Kants Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. Zwi Batscha (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), 350, and Peter Nicholson, "Kant, Revolutions and History" in *Essays on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Howard Lloyd Williams (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 263.

[11] A similar view seems to be presupposed by Sideny Axinn's distinction between the two subjects of Kant's philosophy of history, the individual and the mass of individuals, which in turn presupposes the more questionable distinction between the collective and the distributive properties of mankind (the former morally good, the latter not). In "Kant, Authority, and the French Revolution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* XXXII, no. 1 (January-March 1971), 428.

[12] Patrick Riley, "Hannah Arendt on Kant," in *Akten des Siebenten Internationalen Kant-Kongress*, Band II. 2., ed. Gerhard Funke (Bonn and Berlin: Bouvier Verlag, 1991), 339.

[13] Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 19.

[14] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 1 (Tübingen: J. C. B Mohr/ Paul Siebeck, 1990), 101–5.

[15] Hannah Ginsborg, "On the Key to Kant's Critique of Taste," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1991): 290–313.

[16] Terry Eagleton has called the sublime, mistakenly, I believe, a repressive category of interpretation. See his *Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 90.

[17] This would explain why Stanley Cavell interprets the sublime psychoanalytically: it refers to the outflow of the fundamental psychic powers from under the repressive lid of the super-ego. Apud Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 (1993)], 189–90.

[18] Paul Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime. From Morality to Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 19. Jean-François Lyotard even calls respect the "absolute model" for the sublime in art in his *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, tr. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 158.

[19] Jean Grondin, "*La phénoménologie de la loi morale*" in Duchesneau et al., 52–5. For a complete treatment, systematic as well as historical, of this topic, see Claude Piché, "*La phénoménologie de l'expérience morale chez Kant*" *Kairos* 22 (2003): 123–50.

[20] There is a serious problem with the idea that the highest good is a duty because in his discussion of the *summum bonum* in the second *Critique* Kant defines it as personal happiness in proportion to moral desert, or the synthesis of the material and the formal. But Kant's understanding of the highest good changes from his earlier, theological formulation in the first two *Critiques*, where the highest good is personal, to a broader, teleological conception of the universal highest good in the third *Critique* and in *Religion*, in which happiness is replaced by universal happiness in a moralized world. The object of morality here is no longer the individual, but humankind. And, unlike the noumenal world of the *Groundwork*, this one has "objective reality": it is the kingdom of realized ends (C3 343/5:453). The kingdom of ends, or the ideal standpoint of collective moral judging, corresponds to the institutions, norms of action, and intersubjective attitudes of the ethical community, as described in *Religion* (Rel 109/6:98). It is from this perspective that the highest good can be understood as an imperfect duty. On this issue, see Yirmiahu Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), especially Ch. 1 and the Epilogue, and Andrews Reath, "Two Conceptions of the Highest Good in Kant," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26 (1988): 593–619.

[21] Kenneth R. Westphal makes a similar suggestion about the role of obedience in the constitution of moral character. See, his "Kant's Qualified Principle of Obedience to Authority in the *Metaphysical Elements of Justice,*" in Funke, 366.

[22] Echoes of such beliefs are audible even in some pages from Terry Eagleton's latest book, *Holy Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).