Early Eighteenth Century Conceptions of the Sublime

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Declaration

I, Kathrine Cuccuru, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information is derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

In this thesis, I aim to identify and discuss the *philosophical* conception of the sublime that arises out of the important and influential early eighteenth century discussion in English of the ancient Greek rhetorical text Longinus's *Peri Hypsous* (third century, usually translated in English as *On the Sublime*). To do so, I challenge the historians of aesthetics' conventional approach that aims to identify and isolate the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind in pre-aesthetic accounts of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics. Against the historians of aesthetics' existing picture that deems the earliest English discussion of the sublime in poetry by John Dennis and the so called Longinian Tradition to be only concerned with the rhetorical *sublime style*, I argue that they actually introduce the discussion of the philosophically relevant sublime, which by way of identification will be referred to as the *philosophical sublime*. Also against the historians of aesthetics' existing picture that attributes the Third Earl of Shaftesbury with the first account of *aesthetic concept* of the sublime as a distinct experience of nature, that is, the philosophically narrow *natural sublime*, I argue that Shaftesbury's *philosophical sublime* has broader philosophical implications and a more nuanced relationship with the Longinian Tradition. Employing my history of philosophy approach to these accounts, I reveal that Dennis and Shaftesbury both similarly describe the *philosophical sublime* as a harmonious state of the human soul that when attained by the *sublime genius* is the perfection of human nature; that is, the height of human beauty, virtue, and knowledge. Further, on both of their accounts this *sublime state* of harmony is a form of direct experience of God's divine nature. By looking at Alexander Pope's satirical response to their discussion, I further argue that, although these accounts are deeply concerned with coming to know the *true sublime* and avoiding the *false sublime*, ultimately, they fail to reach the certainty that they aspire to. Thus, I offer a richer and more philosophically sophisticated view of the early eighteenth century discussion of the *philosophical sublime*.

Impact Statement

This thesis offers a new history of philosophy approach to the history of the philosophical concept of the sublime. Its methodological claims have important implications for the field of philosophical aesthetics. My approach overturns the historians of aesthetics existing conventional approach that aims to identify and isolate the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind in pre-aesthetic accounts of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics, such as, the sublime. Instead, by aiming to identify the broader philosophical aspects and commitments of the historical accounts of such concepts, it opens up the ways in which the field of philosophical aesthetics can conceive of itself and its history. It also has potential impact across the history of philosophy regarding the exploration and analysis to history of philosophical concepts. The non-academic impact of approaches in the history of philosophy are seen in shifts in cultural understanding and applications of philosophical theory and development. In this case, aesthetic experience, understanding and appreciation of the world. Beyond this thesis, the main way that this academic impact will be achieved is through the publication in relevant academic journals, monographs, and the related scholarly conversation.

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Postscript

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Most of all the person I want to thank is—me. I realise that every PhD has its trials. Still, I suspect I have had to overcome more than most, and any one of mine alone, reason enough to quit. During my PhD: my largely well-managed CFS and a back problem became unmanageable, with persistent mental/physical disfunction and chronic pain; I had a mental breakdown with a severe depressive episode, suicidal idealisation, and self-harm; completely unfunded and with little chance to work, meant 10 years of no financial independence; contact with my family on the other side of the world has mainly been emergency visits, such as the hospitalising of my father, and this year the death of my uncle; in recent months when my marriage broke down I faced potential homelessness and destitution. Yet my determined constant throughout has been to complete this thesis and now I have done it. Living up to my epithet—I am a Mother Fucking Ninja.

List of Abbreviations of Titles

Works by John Dennis

The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry	*The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry. A Critical Discourse. In two parts.*
The Grounds of Criticism	*The Grounds of Criticism, Contain'd In some New Discoveries never made before, requisite for the Writing and Judging Poetry surely.*
CW1	*The Critical Works of John Dennis*, Volume 1
CW2	*The Critical Works of John Dennis*, Volume 2

Works by Third Earl of Shaftesbury

Characteristics	*Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*
A Letter	*A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm to my Lord *****￼*
Sensus Communis	*Sensus Communis, An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in a Letter to a Friend*
Soliloquy	*Soliloquy, Or Advice to an Author*
An Inquiry	*An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*
The Moralists	*The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody, Being a Recital of Certain Conversations on Natural and Moral Subjects*

Works by Scriblerians

Peri Bathous, PB	*Peri Bathous, Art of Sinking in Poetry* (I have settled on Bathous, rather than Bathos, as this appears to be the original spelling.)
Three Hours	*Three Hours After Marriage*

Glossary of Terms

sublime

refers to the general term or idea; without any conceptual, theoretical, rhetorical, etc, implications

philosophical sublime

a theory or concept of the sublime; which is of philosophical substance, including but is not limited to descriptions of the source, cause and effect, object, and features of the experience, along with any kind of philosophical conditions or commitments

sublime style

the rhetorical grande or high style that is a classical doctrine of oratorical or literary persuasion; in eighteenth century discussion it is further associated with pomposity and overwrought language (aligned with the *false sublime*)

sublime state

the affective state of the soul when experiencing the *philosophical sublime*

true sublime

an instance of the *sublime state* that is a genuine response to the proper objects of the *philosophical sublime* experience

false sublime

an affective state that feels like the true sublime without the proper objects of the *philosophical sublime* experience; the effect of the sublime style as rhetorical persuasion, and instances of pompous and overwrought language

sublime genius

a soul that has the capacity to produce and judge the *true sublime*

sublime poetry

poetry that genuinely expresses the *philosophical sublime*

concept of the aesthetic

a concept or theory that describes a distinct, autonomous kind of perception, experience, value, judgement, etc, that is now identified with the field of aesthetics

aesthetic concept	a concept that is claimed by the field of aesthetics; the paradigm is beauty, but also the sublime, picturesque, taste, etc
the aesthetic	a notion that is meant to pick out a distinct, autonomous kind as a pre-theoretical *concept of the aesthetic*
aesthetic sublime	the *philosophical sublime* claimed as an *aesthetic concept*
pre-aesthetic(s)	any account or discussion, particularly, of *aesthetic concepts*, that appears before the eighteenth century establishment of the *concept of the aesthetic*
Longinian Tradition	the discussion focussed on Longinus's *On the Sublime* and the sublime in poetry
Longinian, Longinians	member(s) of the Longinian Tradition
Longinian sublime	reference to the sublime that is attributed to Longinus or the Longinian Tradition, where the general or theoretical sense is determined by context
the *grand,* the *great,* or *greatness,* magnificence	a counterpart of or alternate name for the *natural sublime*; originally defined by Joseph Addison, as a distinct category of experience of the physical awesome in nature eliciting pleasing astonishment
Ancients and Moderns	the early modern debate over whether or not ancient poetry and/or knowledge are superior to modern forms, and its participants
ancients, moderns; Ancients, Moderns	Lowercase ancient or modern refers to someone from that actual period; for example, the ancient Homer, and the modern Swift. Uppercase Ancient refers to an early modern debater who defends the view that the ancients are superior, for example, the Ancient Swift; whereas Modern refers to an early modern debater who defends the view that the moderns are superior, for example the Modern Wotton

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These notifications to the reader regularly appeared at the beginning of early modern English texts, often to clarify some detail or matter or error or inanity, even an acknowledgement, a debt, a thinly veiled sycophancy or self-service. While less common, others express some cautionary self-reflection. Perhaps the best remembered and certainly the most philosophically significant Advertisement of this sort is David Hume's in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, where he famously repudiates his self-proclaimed juvenilia of *A Treatise of Human Nature*.[1] It is fitting, then, that I offer my own cautionary self-reflection via this common eighteenth century practice. There is a sense in which we historians of philosophy can always find *what* we are looking for in the past. And the *what* that we are looking for is near entirely shaped by our present. Despite our best efforts, we look for what we care about now, the story that means something to us, in what came before, and describe it in or on our own terms. This prejudice introduces both clarity and opacity to our view. The clarity is a sure sense of the *what*, while the opacity is the uncertainty of the *why*. To mitigate our prejudice we historians of philosophy ought to always attempt to understand the original *why* of what we seek. Otherwise, the *what* just reflects back our present prejudice. Perhaps seeking the *why* of those who came before, the story that means something to them, should be our first aim. It has been mine here. To attempt to understand the *why* of the early eighteenth-century sublime in England. *Why* the sublime? *Why* then, there? Nevertheless, and here is my caution, all this still might just be the *what* I was looking for.

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[1] (Hume, 1999, p. 83.)

Introduction

Early Eighteenth Century Conceptions of the Sublime

In this thesis, I aim to identify and discuss the *philosophical* conception of the sublime that arises out of the important and influential early eighteenth century discussion in English of the ancient Greek rhetorical text Longinus's *Peri Hypsous* (third century, usually translated in English as *On the Sublime*). The two main conceptions of the sublime that appear in this discussion are the *sublime style* and *the sublime* (sometimes, mostly retrospectively, referred to as 'sublimity'). It is consistent with the early eighteenth century usage to identify the *sublime style* with the rhetorical grande or high style that is a classical doctrine of oratorical or literary persuasion; whereas, 'the sublime' is identified with a philosophical concept or theory, which, in order to more easily track, will, henceforth, be referred to as the *philosophical sublime* (and remain italicised, along with its cognate terms to indicate consistent technical usage as per the glossary above). It is also within this English discussion that the term sublime is first applied to a particular experience of nature, which will be described here as the *natural sublime*. Nevertheless, identifying the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime* is not straightforward. No less because during the period the term sublime is used in multiple ways, often indiscriminately. But also because, as will be seen, the early eighteenth century philosophical conception of the sublime does not directly align with the *aesthetic concept* that develops later in the century and is now

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claimed by the field of philosophical aesthetics.

To set out this picture of the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime*, I focus on the accounts of John Dennis (1658–1734) and Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713). Taken together, Dennis and Shaftesbury best represent the shift of the *philosophical sublime* from poetry to physical nature. Dennis is attributed with the first English account of the sublime in poetry. He also offers the most developed and representative view of the Longinian Tradition, so called because its various discussants all remain focussed on Longinus's *On the Sublime*. Collectively, the Longinian Tradition advances that Longinus's importance lay in his description of the *philosophical sublime*, which is characterised in poetry by the affective transport of the audience, and that he distinguishes it from the merely rhetorical *sublime style*. The related discussion, then, is centred on what properly constitutes the *philosophical sublime* and most importantly who has the genuine capacity to produce and judge it; with particular attention being paid to determining the true nature of the *sublime genius*. Although similarly entrenched in Longinus, Shaftesbury is recognised as being the first to apply the *philosophical sublime* to a certain experience of physical nature in the development of the philosophical life of the *sublime genius*.

Although directing their accounts at different objects of experience (that is, poetry and physical nature), Dennis and Shaftesbury are both concerned with the nature of the human soul to genuinely experience, judge, and create the *philosophical sublime*. Both describe the *philosophical sublime* as a harmonious state of the human soul, attended by enthusiastic passion, which, when attained by the *sublime genius* is the perfection of human nature; that is, the height of human beauty, virtue, and knowledge. Moreover, on both of their accounts this *sublime cause* of harmony is some form of direct experience of God's divine nature. On Dennis's account, in the *sublime state* the faculties of the soul, that is, reason, the senses, and the passions, are in harmony, which he argues is analogous to the human state prior to the Biblical fall and mirrors God's divine nature. Thus, according

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to Dennis, as an analogue to True Religion, *sublime poetry* rightly moves the human passions toward this harmonious *sublime state*. Whereas on Shaftesbury's account, in the *sublime state* the human soul is in harmony with God's divine nature as immanent in physical nature; he argues that God is the infinite creator mind of the universe, which he argues is a co-operative system. Thus, Dennis and Shaftesbury's accounts of the *philosophical sublime* diverge in relation to their respective world views and understanding of God's divine nature.

Significantly, though, both Dennis and Shaftesbury distinguish and distance their accounts of the *philosophical sublime* from the rhetorical *sublime style* as mere rules of persuasion. This distinction repeats and advances the one observed in Longinus's *On the Sublime* and is common across the early eighteenth century discussion of it. Within this discussion, the *sublime style* is further associated with pomposity and overwrought language, and it is routinely mocked as the *false sublime*. At the time, the accused pedlars of this *false sublime* became the prime target of the satirists, and risked featuring in the scathing parodies of the likes of Alexander Pope and his fellow Scriblerians (that is, members of the Scriblerus Club). In particular, attributed to Pope, *Peri Bathous: Or, Martinus Scriblerus his Treatise of the Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1727, 1728) inverts and plays upon the generally held serious concern about how it is possible to rightly identify the *true sublime* considering that the *false sublime* seemingly elicits the same transporting effects. Therefore, by tracking where Dennis and Shaftesbury's accounts of the *philosophical sublime* converge and diverge, along with Pope's satirical complaint about the *sublime style* understood as the *false sublime*, the early eighteenth century philosophical conception of the sublime comes into full focus.

Importantly, the history of the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime* that I present here resolutely does not fall within the history of philosophical aesthetics. Within the scope of present day philosophy, the philosophically relevant concept of the sublime is narrowly identified as an *aesthetic concept*. In turn, within the scope of the history of philosophy, the

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philosophically relevant history of the *philosophical sublime* is taken to fall under the history of aesthetics. Although concepts claimed by aesthetics, such as, the sublime, have been discussed since the ancients, the well-known history of aesthetics is that Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten introduces the *concept of the aesthetic* in the mid-eighteenth century (initially 1739, and 1750, 1758), which leads to the establishment of the autonomous field of Western philosophical aesthetics. Thus, the early eighteenth century accounts of the sublime are not knowingly working within a framework of the *concept of the aesthetic*. In this pre-aesthetics context, while expressing caution of anachronism, historians of aesthetics nevertheless aim to identify and isolate the aspects of these early accounts that anticipate the later systematic philosophical accounts of the sublime as an *aesthetic concept*; especially, as seen in the aesthetic theory of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant.

On their anticipatory approach, historians of aesthetics agree that the salient feature of the philosophically relevant *aesthetic sublime* is a distinct experience of physical nature that elicits a certain sense of terrible pleasure. Following this criteria, Shaftesbury's *natural sublime* is attributed with being the first account of a distinctly *aesthetic* experience in the history of aesthetics. Historians of aesthetics argue that what marks out Shaftesbury's account as aesthetic is that he rightly anticipates the formal philosophical theories of the *aesthetic sublime*, primarily seen in Burke and Kant. On this existing picture in the history of aesthetics, Longinus's *On the Sublime* is an acknowledged part of the history of the *aesthetic sublime*; significantly, Shaftesbury's account forms the philosophical break from the early eighteenth century discussion of it. Unlike the view I argue for here, however, historians of aesthetics do not see this break in terms of the *philosophical sublime* shifting from poetry to physical nature. Instead, the existing picture in the history of aesthetics denies that Dennis and the Longinian Tradition describe a philosophically relevant concept of the sublime as they do not rightly anticipate the *aesthetic sublime*. Moreover, it is claimed that due to their focus on poetry, Dennis and the Longinian

Tradition are necessarily only interested in the rhetorical *sublime style*.

However, notice that the historians of aesthetics' criteria for philosophical relevance turns entirely on having a *concept of the aesthetic*. The anticipatory approach employed by historians of aesthetics is guided by the question: how does an account of an *aesthetic concept*, namely the sublime, anticipate the development of the *concept of the aesthetic*? But recall that my aim is to identify and discuss the early eighteenth century *philosophical* conception of the sublime. By wholly focussing on identifying and isolating the aesthetic, the historians of aesthetics' anticipatory approach cannot be philosophically exhaustive in its analysis of accounts of the sublime that appear prior to (or early on in) the establishment of the *concept of the aesthetic*. It is reasonable to speculate that pre-aesthetic conceptions of the sublime might have philosophical substance that is not reducible to the aesthetic and is not revealed by the singular aim to isolate it. So taking my aim seriously, I am simply being guided by the question: what is the sublime? Thus, my approach is to identify the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime* without isolating it as aesthetic. For this reason this thesis is not a history of aesthetics.

To make this completely clear, my account of the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime* is not designed to form a new understanding of the historians of aesthetics' *aesthetic sublime*. In turn, it is not a revision of the history of philosophical aesthetics. In particular, I am not relocating, redefining, or expanding upon the *concept of the aesthetic* nor am I attempting to revise the historical development of it. And if there are any revisionary consequences for the history of aesthetics from my approach, I do not intend to explore them here. Instead, I am attempting to set out the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime* completely independently of any such notion of the aesthetic. Importantly, in abandoning the historians of aesthetics' anticipatory approach altogether, my account in no way engages with locating these earlier accounts in relation to the formal, systematic accounts of the *aesthetic sublime* that arise in the mid-eighteenth century. I am purposefully forgetting the subsequent accounts of the

aesthetic sublime, and any related aesthetic concepts, ideas, and questions, along with the establishment of the autonomous field of aesthetics. While it might be necessary for me to mention the likes of Burke and Kant in passing, I insist that this thesis is in no way about them. Unlike the existing histories of the *aesthetic sublime,* this history of the *philosophical sublime* is expressly the antithesis of a preamble to Kant.

As a history of the *philosophical sublime,* this thesis falls within the history of philosophy. As such, I locate the early eighteenth century accounts of the *philosophical sublime* in relation to the questions that they were originally meant to answer, worries that they were meant to address, and philosophical role that they were meant to play at the time. My aim is to analyse these accounts on their own terms. Employing such an approach, I am not simply replacing the aim to isolate the aesthetic with isolating another or other multiple philosophical domains. To again be completely clear, my aim is not to merely perform some sort of history of philosophy addition for the *philosophical sublime*; that is, I am not attempting to additionally identify and isolate the metaphysical, plus the epistemic, plus the moral, plus any other philosophical category, field, or aspect of these accounts in order to add them to or replace the existing aesthetic ones. In contrast, I am interested in identifying the philosophical view as a whole that describes what the *philosophical sublime* is (as an aspect of human nature and experience) and its role in human life. Following on from my brief gloss of Dennis and Shaftesbury's accounts above, the early eighteenth century philosophical view will be seen to centre on determining the right human capacity, and developing the right human character, to judge and produce this *philosophical sublime.*

As a history of philosophy thesis that aims to appropriately 'contextualise' the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime,* some understanding of its broader historical and intellectual context is required. For that reason, I sketch out the features of the Ancient and Moderns debate, known in England as the 'Battle of the Books,' and the period's related political concerns of who might rightly govern civil society, what is

the nature of True Religion and the role of the Church, and how to maintain civil order through social hierarchy. Taking these issues together, the central political and hence intellectual question of the period is: what constitutes the best moral character, our true human nature? And how do we genuinely attain it? I argue that the early eighteenth century discussion of the *philosophical sublime* is attempting in its own way to answer this question. Once more, to be completely clear, this is not a history of ideas that aims to draw out and relate all aspects (or indeed, political, social, religious, or multiple 'contextualisations') of the intellectual history of the sublime in the early eighteenth century. Instead, the history appealed to here serves to explain and establish the philosophical questions, views and worries evident in these accounts. Thus, my sketch of the historical context is meant to be sufficient to discuss these philosophical views on their own terms, but is not meant to be exhaustive of the history of the period's conceptions of the sublime.

Finally, by focussing on the *philosophical sublime*, I am not offering a history of the *sublime style*. Undoubtedly, the early eighteenth century discussion involves both conceptions of the sublime, and having a grasp of the *sublime style* will help identify and clarify the *philosophical sublime*. Nevertheless, my reference to the *sublime style* is subordinate to my discussion of the *philosophical sublime*. Specifically, as mentioned above, the *sublime style* of interest is where it is understood to be an instance of the *false sublime*. While I draw out the philosophical tensions surrounding the given nature of the *sublime genius* and the rhetorical rules of the *sublime style*, I do not attempt to set out the full account of the literary theorising on and application of these rhetorical rules to poetry. For one last time, to be completely clear, this is not a history of literary criticism, literary theory, or indeed, seventeenth to eighteenth century English literature. Although Dennis is recognised as the first professional literary critic, I am not attempting to demonstrate how his account of the *philosophical sublime* and the *sublime style* establishes the autonomous field of literary criticism; or, for instance, how it relates to and advances John Dryden's literary theory;

or indeed how Dennis's interpretation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* shapes the history of English literature.

Having now clearly demarcated the scope of this thesis, I turn to introducing its structure. In Chapter 1, I establish my history of philosophy approach to the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime*. Because the history of the *philosophical sublime* is currently completely understood in terms of the history of aesthetics, I first clearly demonstrate why and how this thesis is explicitly and purposefully not a history of aesthetics. Here I carefully carve out the intellectual space to engage with Dennis and Shaftesbury's accounts of the *philosophical sublime* without appeal (or any relation) to a *concept of the aesthetic*. To make my case, I begin by demonstrating that currently all histories of aesthetics conform to isolating the aesthetic. I argue that this dogmatic convention is applied across histories of aesthetics. It unwittingly though willingly conforms to a Whiggish historiography, where philosophical accounts of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics are only those that anticipate, and/or are related to, the development of the *concept of the aesthetic*. Thus, the historians of aesthetics' anticipatory approach presupposes that the philosophical history of such concepts is *only* anticipatory of the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*. To illustrate the problem, pertinently, I show that on this approach it is wrong to claim that Dennis and the Longinian Tradition are only interested in the rhetorical *sublime style* and that Shaftesbury's account reduces to the *natural sublime*.

Having established the grounds and intellectual space for my alternative history of philosophy approach, in Chapter 2 I set out the *philosophical sublime* in Dennis and the Longinian Tradition in English. In general, it will be shown that their *philosophical sublime* describes a certain harmonious state of the soul, attended by the enthusiastic passions, and caused by God's divine nature. Significantly, genuine sublime poetry is the proper *sublime source* and is contrasted with the mere false appearance of it in the *sublime style*. To gain a full grasp of these accounts, I consider it in the context of the Ancients and Moderns debate and the broader social–

political context in England, marked by shifting political power between Crown and parliament. It has the central concern of who would and how to best govern civil society. Understanding this in terms of the nature of human character, the guiding political and hence intellectual question of the period is: what constitutes the best moral character, our true human nature? And how do we genuinely attain it? In the hands of the Longinian Tradition this becomes a discussion about the *sublime genius*. On this view, the *sublime genius* has the capacity to rightly judge and produce the *philosophical sublime* in virtue of attaining the perfectly harmonious state, which marks the height of the virtuous character.

In Chapter 3, I turn to Shaftesbury's account of the *philosophical sublime*. Again locating it in the context of the guiding political and intellectual question of the time, I reveal that Shaftesbury's account of the *philosophical sublime* is, like the Longinian Tradition, a certain harmonious state of the soul, attended by the enthusiastic passions, and caused by God's divine nature. Also like the Longinian Tradition, for Shaftesbury the *sublime genius* has the capacity to rightly judge and produce the *philosophical sublime* in virtue of attaining the perfectly harmonious state, which marks the height of the virtuous character. However, for Shaftesbury the *sublime source* is physical nature, particularly woods and mountains, and the experience of the *philosophical sublime* is a developmental practice within his enthusiastic philosophy. Thus, the early eighteenth century shift of the *philosophical sublime* is from the mind of the poet to the mind of the philosopher.

In Chapter 4, I raise the central problem for these early eighteenth century accounts of the *philosophical sublime*. The difficulty concerns what makes it possible, for particularly the *sublime genius*, to know the *true sublime* from the *false*. At the time, one of the harshest criticisms was to be charged with peddling the *false sublime*. Such an accused character often became the prime target of the satirists, and risked featuring in the scathing parodies of the likes of Alexander Pope and the Scriblerians. Primarily it is claimed that these apparently faux geniuses lacked the greatness of thought to

properly judge the *true sublime*; instead, they advance the unnatural, idiosyncratic *false sublime*. This complaint exposes a general tension in these accounts between the general irresistibility of the *sublime effect* on all human minds and the *sublime genius's* rare capacity to judge and produce it. Moreover, even for the *sublime genius* the *true sublime* cannot be discerned by its effect, but only by its proper cause — God's divine nature. However, I argue that it remains unresolved how it is possible to know which experience is an actual instance of the *philosophical sublime* rightly caused by God. Thus, I conclude that, although these accounts are deeply concerned with coming to know the *true sublime* and avoiding the *false*, ultimately, they fail to reach the certainty that they aspire to.

Finally, in the Postscript I give a nod to the future of the *philosophical sublime*, in particular the shifts in the concept of the genius seen later in the eighteenth century.

Chapter One

The Problem with the History Of Aesthetics Before Aesthetics

The familiar history of philosophical aesthetics is that it receives its name and establishes its autonomy in eighteenth century Europe. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62) is well known for introducing the term 'aesthetic,' defining it as a distinct mode of sensible knowledge, he writes, 'a science of perception that is acquired by means of the sense' (initially in *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus/Reflections On Poetry* 1739, and again later expanded upon in *Aesthetica* 1750, 1758).[2] Baumgarten is the first to narrowly apply the philosophy of perception to the sensible imagery within works of art, specifically poetry. But, while he is known for naming and conceptually defining the field, historians of aesthetics generally attribute Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) with offering the first description of a distinctly aesthetic experience (*Characteristics*, 1709/11).[3] Specifically, that he introduces the aesthetic sense of 'disinterestedness' that is typically

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[2] The Baumgarten quote is taken from the English translation in (Harrison et al., 2000, pp. 487-491, quoted at 489). This particular phrase (variously translated) is regularly quoted in histories of aesthetics to make this point. See, for example: (Cassirer, 1951, p. 340; Costelloe, 2013, p. 2; Giovannelli, 2012, p. 2; Guyer, 2005, p. 3; 2014, p. 5)

[3] This picture is put forward in, for instance: (Cassirer, 1951, p. 312; Stolnitz, 1961c, 97-133; Guyer, 2005, p. 4, 8-21; 2014, p. 8, 33-47; Costelloe, 2013, p. 11-21.)

associated a with particular autonomous 'mode of perceiving.'[4] It is also claimed that with further eighteenth century refinement, culminating with Immanuel Kant's formalised system (1790), the *concept of the aesthetic* develops into the philosophical discipline of aesthetics in its own right.[5] Further, the field of aesthetics has laid claim on particular concepts that are held to fall under the *concept of the aesthetic*; the paradigm being beauty, but also the sublime, and others.[6] Yet, it is equally recognised that these concepts that are now claimed by aesthetics have been discussed since the ancients.

It raises the question: how might historians of philosophical aesthetics approach accounts of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics, prior to and in the early stages of the establishment of the *concept of the aesthetic*? For instance: to what extent can we rightly say that Plato, Aristotle, or Plotinus have an aesthetic concept of beauty?[7] Generally sensitive to anachronism, anglophone historians of aesthetics are aware that such pre-aesthetic accounts are not working within a framework of a *concept of the aesthetic*; that is, a distinct mode of experience, knowledge, value, and/or judgement; and in this sense they cannot knowingly be describing an aesthetic concept. Nevertheless, I shall demonstrate that historians of aesthetics employ a dogmatic, Whiggish historiography, that systematically (explicitly or implicitly) aims to identify how these pre-aesthetic accounts anticipate the subsequent *concept of the aesthetic*. The main methodological approach that historians of aesthetics

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[4] This common understanding is first seen in Jerome Stolnitz, who goes on to describe it as 'different from such other experience as garden variety perception or moral theory or theoretical enquiry' (1961c, p. 99).

[5] This appears to be the dominant view. See, for example: (Monk, 1935, p. 4, throughout; Cassirer, 1951, p. 333; Ferry, 1993, pp. 77-133; Guyer, 2005, p.36; Guyer, 2014; Brady, 2013, p. 3, 46, 47). Kant's aesthetic theory is in (Kant, 1790 [1987]).

[6] The seminal twentieth-century discussion of the idea and variety of aesthetic concepts is Sibley's 'Aesthetic Concepts' (1959).

[7] Perhaps the most well known discussion of this sort is in Kristeller's 'The Modern System of the Arts' (1951).

employ is to isolate the aspects of these accounts that are distinguishable as aesthetic. As pre-aesthetic accounts have no identifiable positive concept, nor existing framework, of the aesthetic, historians of aesthetics, primarily apply a negative conception to them. This is where the aesthetic is distinguished by what it is not: in particular that it is not any other recognised philosophical category or field, such as metaphysical, epistemic, or moral.

Here I demonstrate that this aim to isolate the aesthetic is the conventional approach employed across existing histories of aesthetics. I argue that it is problematic as the accepted or default convention for approaching the philosophical history of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics, specifically with regard to accounts that appear prior to and in the early stages of the establishment of the *concept of the aesthetic*. Essentially this conventional approach presupposes that the history of concepts claimed by the field of aesthetics is *only* anticipatory of the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*; that is, the philosophical history of concepts such as beauty, sublime, etc, is entirely understood in terms of a *concept of the aesthetic*, positively or negatively construed. The main problem with this presupposition is that regardless of any pre-aesthetics account's potential philosophical *substance*, its philosophical *relevance* is grounded wholly in terms of its isolated aesthetic aspects understood as those that anticipate the subsequent field of aesthetics. Currently, then, accounts or aspects of accounts that fall outside of, or are considered incompatible with, anticipating the *concept of the aesthetic* are in general automatically deemed as non-aesthetic, and subsequently, non-philosophical.

In this chapter, (§1) I carefully set out the conventional approach employed by historians of aesthetics and demonstrate that in all instances they aim to identify and isolate the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind. Then in (§2) I identify the problem with this conventional approach. In particular, I argue that this approach assumes that the history of aesthetics and its related concepts all progress along an arrow of development, which ignores the original context and philosophical role of

concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics. And that it determines philosophical substance entirely in terms of an account's relevance to this line of development. To demonstrate the nature and extent of this problem I look at the case of the sublime. To set the scene (§3), I give an outline of the history of the sublime and its current treatment under the conventional approach by historians of aesthetics. Next (§4), I show that the historians of aesthetics' existing picture of the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime* applies a distinction between the philosophically relevant *natural sublime* and irrelevant *sublime style*. Against this (§5), I argue that the pertinent eighteenth century conceptual distinction is between the *philosophical sublime* and the *sublime style*. It follows that the historians of aesthetics' *natural sublime* does not exhaust the period's understanding of the *philosophical sublime*. As a result (§6), I propose a better picture that advances the distinction between the *philosophical sublime* and the *sublime style,* and its origin in the Longinian Tradition. Finally (§7), I argue that historians of aesthetics wrongly identify Shaftesbury's application of the sublime as merely terminological. Overall, this mistakenly results in an overly reductive picture of Shaftesbury's *philosophical sublime* and the denial of the Longinian Tradition's philosophical relevance.

Importantly, my purpose in establishing this problem with the historians of aesthetics' conventional approach is to permit me to abandon it entirely. By bringing to light the consequences of its dogmatic application to concepts that are now claimed by the field of aesthetics, I clearly carve out the intellectual space for my alternative history of philosophy approach to the discussion of the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime*.

§1 The Conventional Approach to the History of Aesthetics

Without doubt historians of aesthetics accept a difference between engaging in the history of the *concept of the aesthetic* and the history of aesthetic concepts (broadly, that is, concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics). Nevertheless, both turn on some notion or conception of the aesthetic. So, for the purposes of exploring the history of aesthetics and the concepts claimed by the field, what — according to historians of aesthetics — is the aesthetic? Currently, they understand and advance three main notions or working definitions, when they refer to the term aesthetic. These are: (i) the aesthetic as a distinct or autonomous mode or kind of experience; (ii) the aesthetic as a theory of beauty; and (iii) the aesthetic as philosophy of (fine) art. Often historians of aesthetics employ a combination of these three notions along with other accepted ideas, questions, and/or applications that fall under the aesthetic. Thus, they advance (iv) the aesthetic as a familiar family relation of accepted concepts, ideas, and questions. There is also a tendency amongst historians of aesthetics to not offer an explicit working definition at all, often relying on an accepted familiar notion instead. Usually it turns out that they are implicitly employing a version of (iv). Where it appears purposefully left undefined, historians of aesthetics are applying the understanding that the history of aesthetics is whatever is found to be continuous with the current field of aesthetics; that is, (v) the aesthetic as a continuity of the field. I now set each of these out in detail.

(i) Aesthetic as a distinct or autonomous mode or kind of experience.

The notion of the aesthetic as a distinct or autonomous kind of experience reflects Baumgarten's original definition, and it is meant to emphasise and isolate its conceptual distinctness or autonomy. Paul Guyer's *A History of Modern Aesthetics* (2014), over its three volumes, offers the most recent and

most comprehensive history of Western philosophical aesthetics from the establishment of the *concept of the aesthetic*. With the usual caution to not be overly definitionally stipulative, in introducing his first volume on the eighteenth century Guyer, nevertheless, writes: 'I think the core of the subject [aesthetics] is a concern with a kind of experience'(2014, p. 3). Similarly in one of the earliest histories of aesthetics, Benedetto Croce establishes his view 'that Æsthetic is the *science of the expressive* (representative or imaginative) *activity*' and then applies it to his analysis of the history of aesthetics (1909 [1967], p. 155). In this case the distinct aesthetic mode is Croce's kind of expression, that is, the particular intuitive 'attitude of the spirit' (p. 55), see also (pp. 8-11). Thus, this sort of definition aims to isolate the aesthetic as kind of experiential particular.

In order to isolate the aesthetic — especially in relation to accounts where the autonomous field is yet to be established — historians of aesthetics not only define it positively, i.e., what it is, but also, negatively, i.e., what it is not. This is most clearly seen in Jerome Stolnitz's discussion of the eighteenth century development of aesthetics, where he does both (1961b, 1961c). Stolntiz posits that Shaftesbury is the first to describe a distinct 'mode of perceiving' (Stolnitz, 1961c, p. 98). He writes:

> … the crucial point is that disinterestedness is peculiar to one kind of experience. Because the experience is disinterested, it is significantly different from such other experience as garden variety perception or moral theory or theoretical enquiry (Stolnitz, 1961c, p. 99).

Thus, like Guyer, Stolnitz's positive definition of the aesthetic is 'one kind of experience,' which he identifies as Shaftesbury's description of 'disinterestedness.' As its complement, Stolnitz's negative definition is that the aesthetic is *not* any other type of philosophical conceptual category nor field of enquiry.

Another more recent example that explicitly employs a negative definition to isolate the aesthetic appears in Robert R. Clewis's 2019 anthology *The Sublime Reader*. In his editor's introduction, Clewis writes:

> To say that the experience of the sublime is an "aesthetic" one is first and foremost to say what it is not. An aesthetic experience is neither an ordinary, day-to-day experience nor a moral one (Clewis, 2019, p. 2).

Clewis's negative definition is that whatever the aesthetic might be, it is not an 'ordinary' nor 'moral' experience. In turn, repeating Stolnitz's approach, Clewis offers a basic positive definition; that is:

> In an aesthetic experience, the world (or object) strikes us as unfamiliar yet interesting, but worthy of careful attention (Clewis, 2019, p. 2).

Taken together Clewis's positive and negative definitions are designed to isolate the aesthetic as an autonomous kind of experience.

However, considering that the history of aesthetics reaches further back than the establishment of an explicitly aesthetic 'kind of experience,' historians of aesthetics are inclined to appeal to the concepts (the aesthetic kinds) that have been discussed throughout this long history, paradigmatically, beauty.

(ii) Aesthetic as a theory of beauty.

The concept of beauty has been discussed from the very beginnings of philosophy. Yet now it is claimed to be the paradigmatic aesthetic concept. In light of this claim on beauty, historians of aesthetics often trace all, or parts, of its ongoing discussion throughout the history of philosophy. While acknowledging potential anachronism, theories of beauty are nonetheless treated paradigmatically and largely unproblematically as the aesthetic. In the first recognised dedicated history of aesthetics Bernard Bosanquet centres his notion of aesthetic on theories of beauty. He begins with:

> "Æstethetic" was adopted with the meaning now recognised, in order to designate the philosophy of the beautiful as a distinct province of theoretical enquiry… If then "Æstethetic" means the Philosophy of the Beautiful, the History of Æstethetic must mean a History of the Philosophy of the Beautiful (Bosanquet, 1892, p. 1).

More recently, this definition of the aesthetic is explicitly adopted in Richard Glauser's 'Aesthetic Experience in Shaftesbury' (2002). He states parenthetically:

> I use the expression aesthetic experience in the non-technical and, I hope, innocent sense of an experience through which beauty is apprehended and appreciated (Glauser, 2002, p. 2).

The aesthetic as equivalent to a theory of beauty is largely adopted across histories of aesthetics that focus on beauty, but it is also generalised over other concepts claimed by the field of aesthetics.

More broadly, then, this notion of the aesthetic is defined as a (or any) theory of a concept that is now claimed to fall under the *concept of the aesthetic*. In particular relation to the eighteenth century, historians of aesthetics variously instantiate the aesthetic as a theory of beauty, sublime, picturesque, and taste. For instance, according to George Dickie the eighteenth century aesthetic is located in the period's theory (or theories) of taste. He writes:

> The theory of taste was eighteenth-century philosophy's attempt to give an account of such [aesthetic] objects and of the [aesthetic] pleasure and displeasure taken in them (Dickie, 1996, p. 3).

Further, this notion of the aesthetic is often seen as the theoretical system or integrated account of these various concepts during this period. For instance, Walter John Hipple applies this notion to his survey of the eighteenth century accounts of the beautiful, sublime, and picturesque, he writes: 'All three must be seen at once, for the philosophical problem consists partly in their interrelations' (1957, p. 3). And further on, he relatedly suggests that:

> … taste cannot be discussed in abstraction from the nature of beauty, nor is beauty definable apart from the nature of the mind apprehending it (Hipple, 1957, p. 4).

 Similarly, Luc Ferry's *Homo Aestheticus* is concerned with 'subjectivization of the beautiful' in relation to aesthetic systems born out of theories of 'taste' (1993, pp. 9-10).

However, currently anglophone philosophical aesthetics centres on

issues in philosophy of art. As such, concepts such as beauty and sublime and so forth, are now usually discussed in relation to the appreciation and production of art. Thus, historians of aesthetics, especially those wanting to trace the history of aesthetics along the lines of the field's current predilections, focus their aesthetic in terms of art.

(iii) Aesthetic as philosophy of (fine) art.

Aesthetics as the philosophy of fine art is understood to capture the distinct human creative capacity to both appreciate and produce aesthetic objects. This sort of creative production is distinguished from other human production, particularly those activities deemed to be a craft and for utility. Paul O. Kristeller's seminal article 'The Modern System of the Arts' focuses on aesthetics as identified with the philosophy of art. Kristeller's discussion and delineation of the relevant understanding of art with respect to the philosophy of art remains ubiquitous, and worth quoting at length. He writes:

> Although the terms "Art," "Fine Arts" or "Beaux Arts" are often identified with visual arts alone, they are also quite commonly understood in a broader sense. In this broader meaning, the term "Art" comprises above all the five major arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry. These five constitute the irreducible nucleus of the modern system of the arts, on which all writers and thinkers seem to agree… certain additional arts are sometimes added to the scheme… gardening, engraving and the decorative arts, the dance and the theatre, sometimes opera, and finally eloquence and prose literature.
>
> The basic notion that the five "major arts" constitute an area all by themselves, clearly separated by common characteristics from the crafts, the sciences and other human activities, has been taken for granted by most writers on aesthetics to the present day…
>
> It is my [i.e., Kristeller's] purpose here to show that this system of the five major arts, which underlies all modern aesthetics and is so familiar to us all, is of comparatively recent origin and did not assume definite shape before the eighteenth century, although it has many ingredients which go back to classical, medieval and Renaissance thought (Kristeller, 1951, pp. 497-498).

Although Kristeller's sense of the five fine arts has been questioned and

extended by subsequent aesthetic theory (for example, to include film, computer games, etc), it is maintained that art is a particular form of creative production that is distinct from, as he puts it, 'the crafts, the sciences and other human activities.' And thus, aesthetics as philosophy of art is interested in all aspects of that distinct form of activity. In relation to the history of aesthetics, the aim is to dissect the broader historical senses — that encompass all human artifice and also particular skills or techniques — to identify and isolate the distinctly aesthetic sense of art and related questions.

Indeed, this adoption of the aesthetic as philosophy of art appears prominent amongst histories of aesthetics that focus on accounts that appear long before the establishment of the *concept of the aesthetic*. In particular, historians of (putative) ancient aesthetics often employ it with the view to expand and complicate the developmental picture of the arts presented by Kristeller. This is the case in Stephen Halliwell's *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, where he aims to re-situate the framework of a history of aesthetics. He underscores his new framework with a more complex relationship between ancient and modern senses of art (2009, p. 7), which forms a direct challenge to Kristeller's view (pp. 6-14). Similarly, in the editors' introduction to *A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics* (2015)*,* Pierre Destrée and Penelope Murray aim to engage with a broader 'synoptic view of the arts' expanding on the narrow sense of philosophy of art generally applied to ancient aesthetics following Kristeller (Destrée & Murray, 2015, p. 5). In contrast to these projects that expand on the sense of art applied to pre-aesthetic accounts, in *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, Mary Carruthers employs a narrow sense of creative production and art to explain medieval aesthetic experience, understood as a kind of 'human sensation,' which she distinguishes from the 'theology of beauty' (2013, p. 8).

Still, unlike beauty (and other concepts claimed by the field), which can be applied to both the aesthetic in nature and artifice, the philosophy of art appears too narrow, especially with respect to the aesthetic

experience of nature that is most significant in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, for historians of aesthetics (as I suggested above) the thought seems to be that applying aesthetics as philosophy of art to the history of aesthetics simply (even best) reflects the present day usage and refined philosophical focus of the field. For instance, in Alessandro Giovannelli's introduction to the edited collection *Aesthetics: Key Thinkers*, he writes: 'It should be noted that nowadays "aesthetics" is most often used interchangeably with "philosophy of art"' (2012, p. 3). He does go on to acknowledge that the scope of aesthetics is historically and etymologically is not reducible to the philosophy of art, and that certain contributions to the collection require presupposing a such a distinction. Yet, he still concludes that:

> These important qualifications notwithstanding, and keeping in mind the divergence from the etymology of "aesthetics" and the existence of aesthetic questions beyond the realm of art, the identification of aesthetics with the philosophy of art is harmless enough not to raise worries in the following [collection of essays]. (Giovannelli, 2012, p. 3)

Thus, he employs this notion of the aesthetic as philosophy of fine art as a working definition and guide for identifying the key thinkers that are discussed in his collection.

Although it reflects current usage and is meant to encompass a broad sense of the aesthetic, the philosophy of art, and equally theories of beauty (etc), both seem unnecessarily reductive. Also acknowledge that the history of aesthetics can be tracked over a variety of concepts, ideas, and questions, historians of aesthetics often employ some combination of the notions, including art and beauty, that fall within the recognised scope of the aesthetic.

(iv) Aesthetic as a familiar family relation of accepted concepts, ideas, and questions.

Historians of aesthetics often employ a broad scope notion of the aesthetic,

presenting it as some familiar family relation of accepted concepts, ideas, and questions. Such a notion of the aesthetic is employed to simultaneously meet two aims. One aim is that a familiar family relation is meant to reflect the full field of present day philosophical aesthetics that might emphasise the philosophy of art but also encompasses wide ranging issues across aesthetic experience in nature, the everyday, and various related aesthetic concepts and applications. This is most straightforwardly given as the combination of definitions (ii) and (iii), which is often expanded on or directed towards various aesthetic classes, clusters, and issues; that is, a family relation. The other aim is that the aesthetic as some familiar family relation offers enough scope to identify instances of the aesthetic throughout its history and pre-history. As already mentioned above in relation to Guyer, historians of aesthetics are generally cautious about being overly definitionally stipulative in order to avoid anachronistic usage of the term. Thus, as a familiar family relation, the aesthetic becomes an appropriately expansive set of concepts, ideas, and questions that are still recognisably and acceptably understood as aesthetic. As such, they can be variously adapted, applied and traced. This regularly leads to historians of aesthetics offering no explicit working definition nor description of the aesthetic at all, rather taking for granted that we all just straightforwardly knows what it means, and that they are simply positing a familiar generally accepted notion or set of notions.

The appeal to a familiar notion of the aesthetic is often introduced in the context of historians of aesthetics explaining or dismissing any problems of applying the term anachronistically. This is seen in Peter Kivy's first edition preface to *The Seventh Sense: Francis Hutcheson and Eighteenth Century British Aesthetics* (1976), and the second enlarged edition, (2003). He posits that the aesthetic is an appropriate notion to apply:

> I see my work as a study in eighteenth-century aesthetics, and I have, therefore, not scrupled to use the noun "aesthetics" and the adjective "aesthetic" wherever they have seemed to me to be appropriate (Kivy, 2003, p. vii).

In acknowledgment of the objection of anachronistic usage of the term,

Kivy responds:

> … that surely what was done in the eighteenth century in the way of philosophy of art, of taste, of criticism, and of beauty is more like what we call "aesthetics" than it is like anything else. It is different, too, of course. But who would expect it to be in every respect the same? A theory can be different from a contemporary aesthetic theory and still be an *aesthetic* theory (Kivy, 2003, p. viii). (Original emphasis)

Thus, Kivy's understanding and application of the aesthetic entirely rests on a recognised and accepted familiar notion, because nowhere does he elaborate on what might rightly constitute such an 'aesthetic theory.'

Appeal to a familiar notion of the aesthetic has appeared from the early histories of aesthetics. For instance, take Katharine Gilbert and Helmut Kuhn's 1939 survey, *A History of Esthetics* (revised and enlarged in 1956). It aims to sate the 'curious souls who are possessed with more than a common desire to know what esthetic terms mean' (1956, p. viii); yet nowhere do Gilbert and Kuhn directly address what the 'esthetic' itself means or what they mean by it. Instead they slide from appealing to its 'terms' to its apparent field or objects, when Gilbert and Kuhn reveal that they, 'like their proposed readers, were possessed with a more than common desire to know what art and beauty mean' (1956, p. ix). Taking their two proclamations of desire together, Gilbert and Kuhn are actually supposing that the aesthetic is a combination of the working definitions (ii) a theory of beauty, and (iii) a philosophy of art. This same slide has already been seen above in Kivy, where he nonchalantly takes 'what we [now] call "aesthetics"' and eighteenth century instances of 'philosophy of art, of taste, of criticism, and of beauty' to be in some way definitionally equivalent (Kivy, 2003, p. viii).

Historians of aesthetics' appeal to a familiar notion of the aesthetic is meant to reflect the full scope of the field of aesthetics. To achieve this, the aesthetic, then, is often posited as a combination of the working definitions (ii) theory of beauty (or the sublime, picturesque, taste, etc), and (iii) philosophy of art. Such a combination is designed to encompass

not only the theories of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics which can be applied to both nature and artifice, but also the questions surrounding what rightly constitutes art, creative production, and the varieties of art objects. It can be employed implicitly or indirectly as just pointed out in Gilbert and Kuhn, and Kivy; but it is also explicitly and directly stated as the starting point in histories of aesthetics. A recent example of a historian of aesthetics explicitly giving this combined definition is Timothy Costelloe. In *The British Aesthetic Tradition*, Costelloe opens with:

> Today the term aesthetics refers to the identifiable subdiscipline of philosophy concerned with the nature and expression of beauty and the fine arts (Costelloe, 2013, p. 1).

He then goes on to trace its origin in a recognisable British Tradition. The aesthetic as a combination of working definitions (ii) and (iii) can be seen to underscore many of historians of aesthetics' understanding of the aesthetic.

In fact, looking more closely at the examples given above for (ii) and (iii), these descriptions of separate or narrow definitions of the aesthetic — as *either* a theory of beauty *or* philosophy of art — are mostly just emphasising one of these over the other. To demonstrate this, consider again Bosanquet who advocates (ii). After starting with aesthetics as the 'philosophy of beauty,' he goes on to declare that the relevant aesthetic domain of beauty is that of fine art. Specifically he states that: 'Fine Art may be accepted, for theoretical purposes, as the chief, if not the sole representative of the world of Beauty' (1892, p. 3). Likewise, Ferry identifies that the eighteenth century aesthetic systems of taste are grappling with both subjective beauty, and objective art. He writes:

> Modern aesthetics is certainly subjectivist in that it establishes the beautiful on human faculties, reason, sentiment, or imagination. It is nonetheless animated by the idea that the work of art is inseparable from a certain form of objectivity (Ferry, 1993, p. 10).

Thus, Ferry proceeds to focus his understanding of the subjectivization of beauty in relation to art appreciation and production (1993, see especially

pp. 10-13, but also throughout). Kristeller, who advocates (iii), mirrors this. Although he explicitly will not 'try to discus any metaphysical theories of beauty' (1951, p. 498) he does hold beauty to be '[t]he other central concept of modern aesthetics' (p. 499), subsequently tracking its relevant usage throughout his account of the history and development of fine art (1951, see especially, pp. 499-500, 509-10, 517-18).

However, even this combined definition of (ii) and (iii) appears insufficient for or under-describes the full extent of concepts, ideas and questions encompassed by the notion of the aesthetic. In turn, the aesthetic is presented as a certain family relation of them. Władysław Tatarkiewicz approaches the history of aesthetics in this way by setting out the aesthetic as a particular class, with related sub-classes. Tatarkiewicz's classification of aesthetics is initially seen in his 'Classification of Arts in Antiquity'(1963), and additionally advanced in his volumes on the history of aesthetics (1970, 1974). In *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics* (1980), he writes: 'In aesthetics, since time immemorial, the classes deemed useful have been those of things beautiful, pleasing, artistic, the class of forms and creativity'(1980, p. 4). He then suggests that 'modern times seek to amend these classes or to supplant them with others' (p. 4), and he goes on to list the further 'classes' of interest to the aesthetician (pp. 4-5). Similarly, Giovannelli implicitly adopts a more broad familiar family relation of the aesthetic when he identifies how the collection of essays might be variously approached beyond their chronology. Specifically, when he presents certain 'clusters', which include, 'art and emotion,' 'art and culture,' 'beauty,' 'aesthetic experience,' 'interpretation and art criticism,' 'music,' 'creativity,' and 'that art can construct worlds' (Giovannelli, 2012, pp. 5-6).

Clewis also in part sets out his sense of the aesthetic in terms of the current field of philosophical aesthetics understood as a familiar family relation of accepted concepts, ideas, and questions. He describes the aesthetic as an extensive list, which begins as follows:

> Viewed as a scholarly discipline, aesthetics is the study of the nature and value of properties (or experiences) such as beauty, ugliness, grandeur, and sublimity (among other states and qualities), and the investigation of how we enjoy, interpret, appraise, or use art (Clewis, 2019, p. 2).

He goes on to further list numerous elements of aesthetic investigation, scope, and questions of interest. He even reprises employing the negative definition — that is, further demarcating what the aesthetic is not — when he draws an explicit line that the aesthetic is not art history nor art criticism (2019, p. 2).

This broad scope notion of the aesthetic is meant to have sufficient breadth to capture potentially every instance of the aesthetic across its long history. However, in some cases, historians of aesthetics take this notion to be overly definitionally stipulative; instead, they take the history of aesthetics to be whatever is found across historical accounts to form a continuous developmental line that culminates with the current field of philosophical aesthetics.

(v) Aesthetic as continuity of the field.

Beyond an attempt to avoid anachronism, historians of aesthetics reason that employing a non-stipulative, even unspecified, historically contingent notion of the aesthetic best tracks its variation, emergence, and development over its history, including prior to and in the early stages of the establishment of the *concept of the aesthetic*. Recall that Kivy suggests that certain eighteenth century theoretical 'doings' are like what is now called aesthetics, but also claims that 'a theory can be different from a contemporary aesthetic theory and still be an *aesthetic* theory.' So for historians of aesthetics, what explains the difference? One way that, in Kivy's case, an eighteenth century theory can be held to be aesthetic is that it is demonstrably continuous with current aesthetic theory; that is, a connecting line can be drawn between a historical theory and present day aesthetic theory. As a result, wherever a more or less direct line can be

drawn across the history of aesthetics to the present day, any historical account can be relevant by sharing some anticipatory element with the subsequent accounts that lead to the present day notion of the aesthetic. On this picture, it is possible over the course of the history of aesthetics for the aesthetic to be (perhaps completely) different, yet remain identifiably continuous within the field of aesthetics.

The minimal requirement of such an understanding of the aesthetic seems to be some traceable continuity of a recognised *concept of the aesthetic*. Returning to Guyer, he marks out his notion of the aesthetic in exactly these terms when he writes:

> By philosophical aesthetics, I mean works and discussions that are in some way continuous with the topics of aesthetics as it is currently pursued in philosophy departments, whether written by people who in their own lifetimes taught philosophy or otherwise conceived of themselves as philosophers or not (Guyer, 2014, p. 2).

Although Guyer suggests that the aesthetic as continuity of the field leads to indistinct boarders between disciplines, primarily with the history of art and literary criticism, he suggests that:

> How philosophers have conceived of the boundaries of the field has been part of its history, and we will simply have to see how that history goes. The history will have to define the field for us rather than the other way around (Guyer, 2014, p. 3).

Thus, on his account the relevant notion of the aesthetic is taken to be continuous with, and often contingent on, the development of the *concept of the aesthetic*. Guyer's core notion of the aesthetic as a 'kind of experience,' then, appears to guide or delimit the continuity of the field.

I now turn to discuss how these notions of the term aesthetic are employed in doing the history of aesthetics. Significantly, I demonstrate that this forms a conventional approach that aims to identify and isolate the aesthetic.

The History of Aesthetics as Identifying and Isolating the Aesthetic

From my description of the historians of aesthetics' various notions or working definitions of the term aesthetic, it is important to observe that all of them can be reduced to the single definition of the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind. Where, as seen from the discussion above, the kind is variously described. As per: (i) the kind is a certain experience; such as 'disinterestedness,' 'expressivism,' and is contrasted with 'ordinary or everyday' experience; (ii) the kind is an *aesthetic concept,* as will be further seen, distinguished from other philosophical kinds, especially morality; (iii) the kind is art understood as a distinct form of creative production; (iv) as a family relation, the kind is made up of a set of related kinds, importantly, they are autonomous from other sets of (philosophical) kinds (e.g., moral kinds); (v) the kind is the *concept of the aesthetic* that is traced across the various theories throughout the continuous history of aesthetics. Significantly, in every one of these cases, the notion of the aesthetic is isolated (be it defined positively, negatively, or both) from other philosophical and intellectual kinds.

As a result of defining the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind, historians of aesthetics hold that the methodological aim of the history of aesthetics is to identify and isolate the aesthetic — whatever that might be or however it might be construed. Thus, historians of aesthetics (self knowingly or not) follow the methodological convention that the history of aesthetics identifies and isolates the historical instances of the aesthetic as a distinct and autonomous kind. On this conventional approach, then, historians of aesthetics' methodological questions of enquiry are:

What distinguishes the *concept of the aesthetic* as autonomous?

How does this (or these) account(s) of an *aesthetic concept* relate to or advance (the development of) the autonomous field of aesthetics?

With respect to pre-aesthetic accounts, how do they anticipate the

concept of the aesthetic?

To demonstrate this common aim and conventional approach of historians of aesthetics, I reveal how the understanding of the aesthetic as an autonomous kind shapes their approach to the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*, and then, the history of concepts claimed by the field of aesthetics. And in turn, that the conventional approach inextricably links them by presupposing that the history of concepts such as beauty is *only* anticipatory of the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*.

The history of the *concept of the aesthetic* broadly engages in questions about the general development of the field of Western philosophical aesthetics. Although it has a relevant pre-aesthetic history that might be observable since the ancients, the *concept of the aesthetic* is established in eighteenth century Europe. It might remain contentions whether Baumgarten is naming a long held (perhaps previously unnamed) philosophical idea or a recently invented one. Yet it is rightly agreed that the *concept of the aesthetic* only becomes a distinct concept, and in turn, an autonomous field of philosophical enquiry at this time. For this reason, historians of aesthetics who are interested in the origins of the *concept of the aesthetic* concentrating on and around the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth century. These histories are centred on or related to the likes of David Hume (1711–1776), Edmund Burke (1729–1797), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), with associated glances back to Shaftesbury, sometimes French Classicism, and look forward to the height of German Romanticism. Investigations into the ongoing development of the field usually range from this time up to the present day. Across these sorts of histories of aesthetics the guiding question is: what distinguishes the *concept of the aesthetic* as autonomous?

In order to identify the *concept of the aesthetic*, historians of aesthetics begin with a defining notion of the aesthetic as a (or some) distinct, autonomous kind. Regardless of how this kind is described (as per *(i)–(v)* above), it forms the historians of aesthetics' standard or criteria for

determining which historical accounts or theories are relevant to their history of aesthetics. They, then, proceed to isolate their defined kind throughout, or during a particular period of, history. Croce explicitly argues for and clearly applies this approach. At the beginning of 'Part II The History of Æsthetics,' he writes:

> The question whether Æstethics is to be considered as an ancient or a modern science has on several occasions been a matter of controversy; whether, that is to say, it arose for the first time in the eighteenth century or had previously arisen in the Græco-Roman world. This is a question, not only of facts, but of criteria, as is easily to be understood: whether one answers it in this way or that depends upon one's idea of that science, an idea afterwards adopted as a standard or criterion (Croce, 1909 [1967], p. 155).

Croce goes on to establish his criterion, and then attempts to trace it throughout his history of aesthetics.

Unlike Croce, most historians of aesthetics are not as forthright about — nor even aware that they are — applying a standard or criteria to their histories of aesthetics. Nevertheless, they generally express (or imply) some qualification of their term aesthetic that forms such a criterion for identifying the *concept of the aesthetic*. For instance, Bosanquet speaks of tracking an 'aesthetic consciousness' that perceives and produces the beautiful, where beauty is defined as:

> That which has characteristic or individual expressiveness for sense-perception or imagination, subject to the conditions of general or abstract expressiveness in the same medium (Bosanquet, 1892, pp. 3-9, quote at p. 5).

Minimally, the *concept of the aesthetic* is held in contrast to other philosophical kinds, such as, metaphysical, epistemic, moral, so on and so forth. Thus, a central criterion applied to the history of aesthetics is that relevant historical accounts (or the relevant aspects) must not describe any other philosophical kind. This negative criterion is seen explicitly in Clewis and Stolnitz, nevertheless, it is consistently implied across histories of aesthetics. Conversely, the most basic positive criterion applied is the familiar family relation of accepted concepts, ideas, and questions. While such lists suggest expansiveness, flexibility, and broad inclusivity they are

still employed to specifically identify the *concept of the aesthetic*, and isolate the relevant historical accounts. This is most clearly seen in Tatarkiewicz classifications. Yet similarly, Giovanelli's 'clusters' not only guide the reading audience but form a criterion of inclusion of thinkers and thought in his collection.

Perhaps the most pervasive criterion employed by historians of aesthetics is that a historical account must identifiably fall within the scope of, or somehow resemble, the present day field of aesthetics. For instance, it forms the criterion for selection of texts in Oleg V. Bychkov, and Anne Sheppard's edited collection *Greek and Roman Aesthetics* (2010). In their introduction, Bychkov and Sheppard suggest two approaches for connecting ancient accounts and present day aesthetics. One approach, they write, is 'to examine the ancient texts that directly influenced what is now called aesthetic thought' (Bychkov & Sheppard, 2010, p. xi). This take identifies the relevance of ancient accounts in terms of anticipating the *concept of the aesthetic* and the field of aesthetic. The other approach aims to identify what conforms to the present *concept of the aesthetic* and falls within the field of aesthetics. They state it thus:

> to formulate what are commonly held to be aesthetic concerns in modern thought and to see if they can already be found in ancient texts, without limiting the choice of texts to those which have demonstrably influenced modern aesthetics (Bychkov & Sheppard, 2010, p. xii).

Significantly, even where Bychkov and Sheppard appear to further suggest engaging with the ancients on their own terms — specifically, the questions that are at issue for them — they still reduce this to those that anticipate (fall within the scope of) the current issues of aesthetics and philosophy of art (2010, pp. xii-xiv). Since pre-aesthetic accounts cannot knowingly describe the *concept of the aesthetic*, especially as an autonomous kind, on this criterion, the philosophical relevance of such accounts is determined by their anticipation the *concept of the aesthetic*.

Historians of aesthetics interested in accounts prior to the eighteenth century establishment of the *concept of the aesthetic* regularly

appear to narrow the criteria to focus on the philosophy of art. As seen above, Bosanquet, Beardsley, Kristeller, Giovanelli, and Ferry, all narrow their scope to art (variously construed). Regarding the middle ages, Carruthers focusses on creative production of art for the explicit purpose of distinguishing the aesthetic from theological. Regarding ancient accounts, the focus on the philosophy of art emerges as a challenge to Kristeller's view of the development of the autonomy of the fine arts. In Halliwell's reframing of the history of aesthetics, he advances that:

> an underlying concern of the entire project is to demonstrate that the relationship between ancient and modern concepts of "art" is much more complex, even paradoxical, than orthodox accounts and received opinions might make us believe (Halliwell, 2009, p. 7).

Similarly, Destrée and Murray's editorial aim in their collection of essays on ancient aesthetics is to go against it being 'treated largely from the point of view of the philosophy of art,' instead to:

> take a broader view: this is not a book whose primary purpose is to analyze the classical antecedents of eighteenth century aesthetics, important as they were. Our concern, rather, is with ancient aesthetics as a subject in its own right. This volume, the first of its kind, presents a synoptic view of the arts, which crosses Traditional boundaries and explores the aesthetic experience of the ancients across a range of media — oral/aural, visual, and literary (Destrée & Murray, 2015, p. 5).

Nevertheless, merely aiming to expand the scope of the philosophy of art to be 'much more complex' or one that 'crosses Traditional boundaries' still grounds relevance and analysis in terms of the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind, albeit in a more expansive sense. Again on this criterion, the philosophical relevance of pre-aesthetic accounts remains determined by their anticipation of a *concept of the aesthetic*.

Due to early modern accounts forming the origins of the *concept of the aesthetic,* historians of aesthetics largely move from the criterion that anticipates to one that establishes the autonomy of the field. Thus, they focus on identifying and isolating the particular aspect of these early modern accounts that distinguishes the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind, which can be directly linked with the present day field

of aesthetics. For instance, Stolnitz claims that 'disinterestedness' best leads to the current 'commonplace' understanding of the autonomy of art and aesthetic objects. He writes:

> It is, in our own time, so much a commonplace that the work of art and aesthetic object generally is "autonomous" and "self-contained" and must be apprehended as such, that we have to catch ourselves up. This has not always been a commonplace… Here I only venture the suggestion that "disinterestedness," more than any other single idea, made this movement articulate and gave impetus to it… The British were the first to envision the possibility of a philosophical discipline, embracing the study of all of the arts, one which would be moreover, autonomous, because its subject-matter is not explicable by any of the other disciplines (Stolnitz, 1961b, p. 131).

Stolnitz highlights that a central aspect of the present day field of aesthetics is that it is autonomous, which on his terms is underscored by the aesthetic being valued (in some way) for its own sake and independently of other values (Stolnitz argues, that is, disinterestedly).[8] Generally, historians of aesthetics hold that the prime criterion for determining the relevance of historical, especially early modern, accounts to the history of aesthetics it that they describe an autonomous *concept of the aesthetic* (however it might be construed).

Nevertheless, it might be objected that historians of aesthetics working with the notion of 'the aesthetic as continuity of the field' are expressly going against applying any criteria to the history of aesthetics. And it might be further suggested, the *concept of the aesthetic* might now be clearly autonomous, yet under this approach it is not a requirement across

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[8] To be clear, the point here is not that Stolnitz rightly identifies disinterestedness as the defining criterion of the autonomy of the aesthetic. Or indeed that he even rightly identifies the aesthetically relevant sense of disinterestedness in Shaftesbury and others. Rather the point is that he exemplifies the idea of the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind forming the criteria for determining which early eighteenth century accounts count as aesthetic. Therefore, Dickie's twentieth century denial of Stolnitz's account of disinterestedness, what Dickie calls the 'myth of the aesthetic attitude' (Dickie, 1964) does not touch this point. Nor does Miles Rind's complaint that Stolnitz wrongly attributes Shaftesbury, etc, with an aesthetic theory of disinterestedness (Rind, 2002). In fact, Rind's view reinforces my point that historians of aesthetics are primarily interested in identifying and isolating the aesthetic.

its history. This seems the case when Guyer states that the 'history will have to define the field for us rather than the other way around.' However, as I suggest above, he appeals to a particular understanding of the 'kind of experience' that guides — is the criteria for — his history of aesthetics. He further specifies the kind he is interested in as follows:

> As we will see, each of these ideas — of the cognitive value of aesthetic experience, of the emotional impact of aesthetic experience, of the free play of our distinctively human capacities — has taken many different forms, and they have sometimes entered into different combinations with each other, sometimes not. Tracing out the different forms and combinations of these ideas — and suggesting that greater value lies in their synthesis than in their separation — is the task of this work. That I have organized my narrative around these three ideas is another reason this work is called only a history of modern aesthetics — there are no doubt other ways to do it (Guyer, 2014, p. 9).

Thus, here and elsewhere Guyer contends that the original and defining feature of the development of the *concept of the aesthetic* is the synthesis of subjective and objective aspects of aesthetic experience in the 'idea of freedom of the imagination,' which he argues is first anticipated by Shaftesbury and others, then formally and systematically set out in Kant (Guyer, 2003, 2005, 2014). On Guyer's view, the relevant idea of freedom is autonomous action and expression, in relation to the *concept of the aesthetic* as an autonomous experience, judgement, value (2005, pp. 5-6). Thus, this approach maintains the criteria of distinguishing the autonomous *concept of the aesthetic*.

Like Croce, Guyer notes that 'there are no doubt other ways' to do the history of aesthetics. Yet, as seen in Guyer's list of existing alternative histories, these too all apply some criteria for identifying what establishes the autonomy of the *concept of the aesthetic*. In summary, Guyer (2005, pp. 4-5) refers to: the establishment of the (fine) arts (Kristeller, 1951), the modern concept of the sublime (Monk, 1935), the artistic genius (Abrams, 1953), the emergence of subjectivity and individuality (Ferry, 1993), and the practical ideology of universality (Eagleton, 1990). In reference to Guyer's list of 'other ways,' Costelloe makes the further suggestion that:

One might also add George Dickie's contention that the period marks a shift in emphasis from "objective notions of beauty to the subjective notion of taste"; Ronald Paulson's observations that aesthetics was an "empiricist's philosophy based on the sense rather than reason or faith"; James Engell's contention that the Enlightenment created the idea of the "creative imagination" (Costelloe, 2013, pp. 4-5).

Additionally, Costelloe's own aim is to identify the British origin of the 'singular' field of aesthetics and trace that distinct Tradition up to the early twentieth century (2013, pp. 1-5, throughout). Historians of aesthetics, then, might differ as to what constitutes the *concept of the aesthetic* but agree that its historical development is traced by identifying and isolating its distinct features that establish its autonomy.

Under these general criteria, historians of aesthetics share the view that the autonomy of the *concept of the aesthetic* is reflected in the emergence of both the autonomy of its objects of experience (art and the affect of nature), and the autonomy or individualisation of the subjects of such an experience. As I have described above, Stolnitz identifies the original autonomous *concept of aesthetic* to be disinterestedness, drawing a line from it to today's notion of autonomous aesthetic objects. As also described above, Guyer argues that the *concept of the aesthetic* is established with Kant's synthesis of the subjective and objective, in the free play of the imagination. Ferry similarly appeals to Kant's synthesis of classical objectivism and subjective sentimentalism to argue that it establishes the aesthetic individual (that is, Ferry's 'Homo Aestheticus'). Indeed, it is the accepted view of historians of aesthetics that Kant offers the first philosophically formal and systematic account of the *concept of the aesthetic* that properly establishes aesthetics as an autonomous philosophical field. Samuel L. Monk is perhaps the earliest historian of aesthetics to explicitly argue for this view, writing that:

> It was Kant who took the isolated discoveries of earlier thinkers and welded their fragmentary aesthetic together so as to create a truly philosophical system, and who, moreover, found a place in his larger system for aesthetic theories (Monk, 1935, p. 4).

Even if they give more credit to the earlier accounts, historians of

aesthetics continue to take Kant's account of the autonomous *concept of the aesthetic* as the culmination and standard of the initial self-aware development of the field of aesthetics. In particular, historians of aesthetics measure the relevance and sophistication of early eighteenth century accounts by the extent that they anticipate the salient features of Kant's account.

To illustrate the extent and way that Kant's role in the history of aesthetics is taken for granted by historians of aesthetics, consider Dabney Townsend's editor's introduction to his anthology *Eighteenth Century British Aesthetics*. To address using the term aesthetic anachronistically, Townsend writes:

> [The term aesthetic] is also misleading because the issues in eighteenth-century British discussions centred on the arts and do not reflect many of the Kantian presuppositions that references to aesthetics now take for granted. Kantian notions of disinterestedness, intuitive sensibility, and the free play of the imagination, as well as relations to art, the beautiful, and the sublime based on an aesthetic attitude appear, if at all, only in tentative ways in the eighteenth century…

> Nevertheless, it is now taken for granted that, even if the concepts themselves are not present, our understanding of them requires us to look back before their origin to their roots in philosophy and criticism of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Townsend, 1999, p. 2).

Thus, by assuming Kant's account of the *concept of the aesthetic* forms the standard understanding of the aesthetic, Townsend's criteria for his choice of late seventeenth-early eighteenth texts is that they anticipate Kant. This criteria also informs Townsend's analysis of the development of aesthetic experience in the eighteenth century, see, for example his (1987).

For historians of aesthetics, in general, the salient features of Kant's account form the standard or criteria for identifying and isolating the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind in the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*. On this criteria, pre-aesthetic and early accounts are assumed philosophically immature or nascent approximations of the *concept of the aesthetic,* and thus, their relevance to the history of aesthetics is measured

by the extent that they anticipate Kant. Correspondingly, the philosophical relevance and sophistication of mid-/late eighteenth century accounts is measured against Kant and subsequent nineteenth century accounts are understood as continuous with and advances of Kant's theory. Of course, there are historians of aesthetics who aim to 'complicate' or 'expand' on this Kantian story of the history of aesthetics. For instance, Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla claim that their anthology *The Sublime: A Reader in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* does exactly that; nevertheless, they do not abandon a Kantian measure, rather they simply reorientate it to suggest that earlier accounts complicate or expand on the reading of Kant's aesthetic theory (Ashfield & de Bolla, 1996, pp. 2-3). Yet even on these terms, the relevance of pre-aesthetic and early accounts remains determined by their anticipation of a Kantian *concept of the aesthetic*. Now turning to the history of concepts claimed by the field of aesthetics, it will continue to be seen that Kant forms the standard kind in the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind.

In contrast to the history of the *concept of the aesthetic* that is interested in the field as a whole, the history of these claimed concepts focusses on questions about the nature and development of particulars within the field. On the face of it, the guiding question of enquiry is: What is the theory of (primarily) beauty? Or any concept that is now claimed to fall under the *concept of the aesthetic,* including the sublime, picturesque, even taste, or in Halliwell's instance mimesis. Considering that these now *aesthetic concepts* have been discussed since the ancients, historians of aesthetics acknowledge that such pre-aesthetic accounts are not working within a framework of a *concept of the aesthetic*, and cannot knowingly be describing an *aesthetic concept*. Therefore, it would seem to follow from this question of enquiry that historians of aesthetics who discuss pre-aesthetic or early accounts of concepts that are now claimed to be *aesthetics concepts* essentially analyse them on their own intellectual terms and context, regardless of the extent that such accounts conform to or anticipate the *concept of the aesthetic*. However, historians of aesthetics actually continue to

employ the conventional approach to identify and isolate the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind.

The aim of historians of aesthetics' remains to distinguish the aesthetic aspect of concepts such as beauty, sublime, so on so forth. For instance, Bosanquet not only identifies the history of aesthetics as 'a History of the Philosophy of the Beautiful' but also defines a particular aesthetic sense of beauty as 'characteristic or individual expressiveness for sense-perception or imagination,' which he traces and isolates throughout history. Similarly, Hipple understands that his task is to isolate the — as he acknowledges, anachronistic — 'aesthetic theory' as it emerges in certain eighteenth-century accounts of beauty, sublime, picturesque, as distinct from any other philosophical commitments that might exist in these accounts (1957, pp. 3-10). Hipple's appeal to the aesthetic directly informs his choice to begin with Joseph Addison (1672–1719), who Hipple claims 'formulated the problems of aesthetics in such a fashion as to initiate that long [eighteenth century] discussion of beauty and sublimity' (1957, p. 13). Likewise, Clewis establishes his positive and negative definitions of the aesthetic along with his lists of what falls within the field of aesthetics for the purpose of determining which texts on the sublime describe an identifiably *aesthetic concept*, and thus, can be rightly included in his anthology.

Indeed, it largely appears that to *do* the history of concepts claimed by the field of aesthetics amounts to, or seemingly requires, *doing* the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*. This rests on the historians of aesthetics' accepted view that the *concept of the aesthetic* arises out of an identifiable intellectual shift in the understanding of putative *aesthetic concepts*. This is most clearly seen in Monk's seminal account of the sublime. But it is also recently evident in Costelloe, who primarily tracks various concepts claimed by the field of aesthetics to demonstrate the development of the *concept of the aesthetic* that he takes to identify a particular British aesthetic Tradition (Costelloe, 2013), this is similarly repeated in, for instance, (Cassirer, 1951, p. 333; Ferry, 1993, pp. 77-133;

Guyer, 2005; Stolnitz, 1961a). On the conventional approach, then, the guiding question of enquiry regarding the history of *aesthetic concepts* is actually: How does (or do) this (or these) account(s) of a putative *aesthetic concept* relate to or advance (the development of) the autonomous field of aesthetics? And furthermore: With respect to pre-aesthetic accounts, how do they anticipate the *concept of the aesthetic*? Standardly, then, within the history of aesthetics, the conceptual development of the *concept of the aesthetic* and its claimed concepts, that is, *aesthetic concepts*, is taken to (somehow) necessarily correspond. As such, the *concept of the aesthetic* forms the criterion or standard for identifying and isolating *aesthetic concepts*. Stolnitz exemplifies the full extent of this correspondence, employing this criterion when he traces the relation of the putative *aesthetic concept* of beauty to the eighteenth century development of the *concept of the aesthetic* that he defines as 'disinterestedness'; which he argues explains beauty's own eventual decline within the field of aesthetics (Stolnitz, 1961a). The same can be seen in Dickie's appeal to taste and Ferry's subjectivization of beauty.

Evidently, then, this approach to identify the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind is the methodological convention employed across existing histories of aesthetics. The conventional approach employs a criterion or standard to determine the *concept of the aesthetic*, which is applied to the history of the development of the field of aesthetics and in turn is used to isolate the putative *aesthetic concepts* throughout history. When historians of aesthetics have the explicit aim is to understand how concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics anticipate the *concept of the aesthetic*, the conventional approach offers a valuable framework in approaching the history of aesthetics. Yet as I have clearly demonstrated, historians of aesthetics dogmatically apply this approach across histories of aesthetics, regardless of the period and intellectual questions of concern the historical accounts might be addressing. It presupposes that the history of *aesthetic concepts* is *only* anticipatory of the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*. Yet, remembering that *aesthetic concepts* have been discussed

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since the ancients, while the *concept of the aesthetic* was only established mid-eighteenth century, this anticipatory picture cannot exhaust the frameworks or approaches to analysing the philosophical history of concepts that are now claimed by the field of aesthetics, especially, the paradigm beauty, but also the sublime, etc, and even forms of creative production, such as poetry and rhetoric. Now I turn to demonstrate why this is a problem.

§2   The Problem with the Conventional Approach

Historians of aesthetics largely assume that they are innocently applying the aesthetic to accounts of concepts, ideas, and forms of creative production that are now claimed by the field of aesthetics. For instance, recall from above that Giovanelli describes his appeal to philosophy of art as 'harmless' and Kivy has 'not scrupled to use the noun "aesthetics" and the adjective "aesthetic" wherever they have seemed to me to be appropriate.' Also recall that Glauser claims that he is applying the aesthetic in the 'innocent sense of an experience through which beauty is apprehended and appreciated.' It follows from Glauser's description that the innocent sense of the aesthetic will encompass Shaftesbury's complete conception of beauty, whatever that might be. Among other things, Shaftesbury consistently claims that there is an identity between beauty and good; explicitly stating (more than once) 'that beauty… and good … are still one and the same' (*Characteristics*: 320; see also 327, 254–325).[9] So, regardless of how Shaftesbury's identity is rightly interpreted, because it is central to his understanding of beauty his discussion of the good will

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[9] All references to Shaftesbury will be from the Klein edition of *Characteristics of Men, Manner, Opinions, Times* (Shaftesbury, 1999), and will be referenced as (*Characteristics*: page number/s).

fall under the aesthetic on Glauser's innocent sense.

However, Glauser goes beyond the innocent sense to apply the conventional approach's definition of the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind, aiming to isolate Shaftesbury's putative aesthetic account of beauty from all other philosophical, especially moral, claims about it. Glauser advances that Shaftesbury holds a species view of beauty and good from which the specifically aesthetic aspects can be identified and isolated. Glauser writes, 'that moral goodness and virtue are species of beauty' (2002, p. 43), which appears to extend from his interpretation that Shaftesbury distinguishes 'moral beauty' from artistic and natural beauty (p. 28). Glauser goes on to claim that Shaftesbury's account 'has implications that must be seen from two different perspectives'; specifically, these are 'moral philosophy' and 'aesthetics' (pp. 43-44).[10] Thus, Glauser attempts to identify and isolate an autonomous aesthetic in Shaftesbury rather than his theory of beauty in its entirety. Relatedly, Shaftesbury's identity claim suggests that he has a single or unified perspective on beauty and good, and is unlikely to recognise let alone accept Glauser's interpretation. Thus, Glauser not only applies a theoretically loaded sense of the aesthetic but also one that potentially falls outside of Shaftesbury's own possible view. I contend that it is not innocent nor methodologically harmless that the conventional approach applies a (or any) notion of the aesthetic with the related aim to isolate an autonomous kind, that is, a *concept of aesthetic,* to the history of aesthetics.

The overall problem with the conventional approach to the history of aesthetics lies in the generally accepted presupposition that the history of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics is only anticipatory of the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*. As clearly established by my

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[10] Although my concern is the methodological convention in the history of aesthetics, it is worth noting that the same seemingly 'innocent' species view of beauty and good in Shaftesbury is repeated from the perspective of 'moral philosophy.' In *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640–1740* Stephen Darwall writes: 'The virtuous is, Shaftesbury believes, a species of beauty' (1995, p. 179). Further on, still in reference to Shaftesbury, Darwall repeats: 'Moral goodness is a species of beauty' (1995, p. 185).

discussion of existing histories of aesthetics, historians of aesthetics share the methodologically isolationist aim to identify the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind in historical accounts and isolate it from other philosophical commitments or categories found in those accounts. In particular, for pre-aesthetic accounts, in the absence of such a concept, the aesthetic is usually defined negatively or in contrast to other recognised fields of philosophical enquiry. To reprise and combine Stolnitz and Clewis, the negative definition is whatever might be 'different from garden variety perception or moral theory or theoretical enquiry' often along with not being an 'ordinary, day-to-day experience.' Treated as its corollary, the positive description of the *concept of the aesthetic* is the aspect of an account that establishes some sense of autonomy, which has been seen in Guyer, Costelloe and their summaries of historians of aesthetics. In accordance with such a definition, historians of aesthetics apply a criterion or standard to historical accounts; that is, the relevance and philosophical substance of an account is determined by the extent that it anticipates the *concept of the aesthetic*. However, this methodological convention leads to detrimental consequences, particularly for pre-aesthetic accounts of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics.

Problematically, it assumes that the intellectual development of aesthetics advances along, what might be called, an *arrow of knowledge*. It accepts that there is a unified, accumulative line of development that moves from disparate, undeveloped, even confused *aesthetic concepts* to a refined distinct autonomous *concept of the aesthetic*. As such, historians of aesthetics are (wittingly or not) applying a Whiggish historiography, itself an Enlightenment ideal, across histories of aesthetics. The worry with this approach originates with Herbert Butterfield, who writes: 'It is part and parcel of the Whig interpretation of history that it studies the past with reference to the present' (Butterfield, 1931 [1965], p. 11). Although 'unobjectionable' when used under careful consideration, he warns:

> On this system the historian is bound to construe his function as demanding him to be vigilant for likenesses between past and

present, instead of being vigilant for unlikenesses; so that he will find it easy to say that he has seen the present in the past, he will imagine that he has discovered a 'root' or an 'anticipation' of the 20th century, when in reality he is in a world of different connotations altogether, and he has merely tumbled upon what could be shown to be a misleading analogy (Butterfield, 1931 [1965], pp. 11-12).

Further, a Whig history assumes that history is inherently progressive and that the past causes or converges on the present by 'principle of progress' (Butterfield, 1931 [1965], p.12).

Whiggish historiography follows an anticipatory approach that identifies, judges or measures past understanding, thought, or knowledge in terms of, and in progress towards, our present understanding, thought, or knowledge. The dominant current debate regarding the appropriateness of Whiggish historiography surrounds the history of science; see for example (Alvargonzález, 2013; Mayr, 1990). Although throughout history, science and technology appear to advance along a 'principle of progress,' the idea that this is actually the case arises out of early modern debate,[11] where intellectual progress becomes an Enlightenment ideal. Thus, there is a possible gap between tracking the historical development of science, and the idea that science progresses along a certain line of improvement. This raises current debate over what constitutes an appropriate approach to the history of science. Like the idea of science, the idea of aesthetics arises during, and is associated with, the Enlightenment ideal of progress. However, there is no equivalent debate or questioning of the anticipatory approach regarding the history of aesthetics. Instead, as evidenced here, historians of aesthetics' dogmatic default is to conform to a criterion grounded in the current field of aesthetics in order to determine the relevance and philosophical substance of historical accounts. As perhaps the beginning of a debate on methodology, here, I argue that this accepted default approach to the history of aesthetics adversely affects the philosophical analysis of pre-aesthetic and early accounts of concepts claimed by the field of aesthetics.

[11] The Ancients and Moderns debate will be discussed in Chapter 2, §1.

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By appealing to this developmental arrow, or Whiggish 'principle of progress,' the conventional approach adversely imposes *primitivism* and *prescriptivism* on pre-aesthetic and early accounts. Historians of aesthetics generally accept that the developmental picture of the *concept of the aesthetic* goes from disparate and mixed proto-*aesthetic concepts* to the philosophically formal and systematic aesthetic theory. So, in virtue of coming earlier in this developmental story, pre-aesthetic and early accounts of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics are automatically seen to be inherently *primitive* to later properly aesthetic accounts. In turn, these pre-aesthetic and early accounts are generally treated as necessarily nascent, under-/undeveloped, which automatically denies their potential philosophical sophistication, and in some cases, value. Most significantly, the conventional approach's standard or criterion *prescribes* which and to what extent pre-aesthetic and early accounts are philosophically relevant, without regard for their broader philosophical substance nor potential philosophical significance. By beginning with a certain conceptual endpoint, that is, a distinct *concept of the aesthetic,* pre-aesthetic and early accounts that do not progress towards or rightly anticipate this particular endpoint are automatically excluded. Currently the history of philosophy takes the history of philosophical concepts that are now claimed by the field of aesthetics to fall entirely under the history of aesthetics. Therefore, pre-aesthetic and early accounts of such concepts that are excluded from the history of aesthetics are automatically assumed to be non-philosophical, and are only incidental to, or fall outside of, the history of philosophy.

The conventional approach, then, determines philosophical relevance entirely in terms of anticipating the *concept of the aesthetic*, which best reflects the current field of aesthetics. Under certain circumstances, where (as Butterfield suggests) it is done with careful consideration, this might be an acceptable approach to the history of aesthetics; notable, where the focus is to trace the development of the *concept of the aesthetic*. However, the problem is that with regard to *aesthetic concepts* — broadly

construed as those concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics — the conventional approach is the *only* way that they are analysed. Although historians of aesthetics regularly acknowledge that pre-aesthetic and certain early accounts of these putative *aesthetic concepts* cannot be knowingly working within the framework of a *concept of the aesthetic,* currently their sole method of analysis is to impose such a framework on them. Yet, merely aiming to identify and isolate the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind in these accounts cannot exhaust their philosophical substance. Nevertheless, this is what is assumed by historians of aesthetic, and, more broadly, accepted by historians of philosophy. Against this, I argue that reducing these accounts to the anticipatory picture of the history of aesthetics obscures their philosophical substance and significance to the history of philosophy.

A further pressing consequence of the conventional approach is that its methodological question overrides the original question of enquiry and context that pre-aesthetic and early accounts of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics were addressing at the time. That is, the conventional approach aims to answer, as seen above: How does (or do) this (or these) account(s) of an *aesthetic concept* relate to or advance (the development of) the autonomous field of aesthetics? And then, with respect to pre-aesthetic accounts, how do they anticipate the *concept of the aesthetic*? Accepting that such accounts cannot knowingly be aiming for an aesthetic theory of these concepts, historians of aesthetics then seek out how they anticipate one. However, for the historical figures producing these pre-aesthetic accounts, their theories and related concepts are performing different philosophical roles with potentially various theoretical, metaphysical, moral, or other commitments. Thus, the conventional approach imposes an *ahistorical* question of enquiry on them, which is indifferent to the context and original question of enquiry that these accounts are attempting to answer. By perpetually isolating these accounts from their original context and purpose, I again argue that the conventional approach obscures their philosophical substance and

significance to the history of philosophy.

For these reasons, I contend that there are grounds to approach pre-aesthetic and early accounts of concepts that are now claimed by the field of aesthetics independently of a *concept of the aesthetic*. Such an approach would fall within the history of philosophy but not (or not necessarily) within the history of aesthetics. Its basic guiding question would simply be: What is the theory of beauty? Or the sublime, picturesque, even poetry, etc. And it would have the aim to understanding and analyse these concepts in their original context and in relation to their original question of enquiry. To be clear, I am not suggesting that this is the singularly *right* way to approach these sort of accounts;[12] rather, that it is a mistake to take for granted that the conventional approach is the *only* way. It is also not my purpose here to set out the overall implications for the history of aesthetics. I am just carving out the intellectual space to approach pre-aesthetic and early accounts in a new way. Specifically, a space to discuss the *philosophical* conception of the sublime that arises out of the important and influential early eighteenth century discussion in English of Longinus's *On the Sublime,* without identifying or isolating the aesthetic.

In order to clearly set out the philosophical gap that I aim to fill, and to motivate the value of my approach, I shall spend the rest of this chapter demonstrating how the problem of the conventional approach specifically impacts the early eighteenth century discussion of the *philosophical sublime*. I argue that as a result of the conventional approach, the historians of aesthetics' current view of the development of the *aesthetic sublime,* fails to capture the full philosophical substance and significance of these accounts. Before discussing the existing picture of *aesthetic sublime* advanced by historians of aesthetics, I shall first demonstrate how existing histories of the sublime employ the

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12 For a variety of views on the practice of the history of philosophy see: (Lærke, Smith, & Schliesser, 2013). And general debated views about the role of the history of philosophy, see *Synthese* Volume 67(1), guest editor Joseph Pitt, 1986.

conventional approach.

§3 The History of the Sublime as the History of Aesthetics

For many historians of aesthetics the history of the sublime is inextricably linked with the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*. Unlike the long history of the field's paradigm, beauty, the sublime is identifiably a modern term. The concept of the sublime does have ancient origins, which James I. Porter rightly points out goes beyond and prior to Longinus's *On the Sublime* (Porter, 2015, 2016). Nevertheless, the late seventeenth century introduction of its name and conceptual definition parallels Baumgarten's later establishment of the *concept of the aesthetic*. In the case of the sublime, French critical theorist Nicholas Boileau-Despréaux (1636–1711) is famed for establishing and popularising it (Brody, 1958; Clark, 1925; Kerslake, 2000, pp. 41-64; Monk, 1935, pp. 29-42; Pocock, 1980). Boileau's 1674 translation of the ancient Greek rhetorical treatise *Peri Hypsous* as *Traite du Sublime* introduced its name, while his commentary on that text initially defined the concept. Published in 1652 John Hall's English translation 'Peri Hypsous or Dionysius Longinus on the Height of Elegance' actually pre-dates publication of *Traite du Sublime*, yet it is Boileau's later translation as the term 'sublime' that is eagerly adopted in Britain, influencing the discussion in English (Monk, 1935, pp. 18-28). The impact of Boileau's translation and commentary is reflected in Doctor Samuel Johnson's Dictionary's 1755 reference to it as 'a Gallicism…naturalised.'[13]

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[13] The relevant definition, in full (quoted in Ashfield & de Bolla, 1996, p. 111):

> SUBLIME. n.s. The grand or lofty stile. *The sublime* is a Gallicism, but now naturalised.
>
> Longinus strengthens all his laws,
>
> And is himself the great *sublime* he draws. [Alexander] Pope.
>
> The *sublime* rises from the from the nobleness, of thoughts, the magnificence of the words, or the harmonious and lively turn of the phrase; the perfect *sublime* arises from all three together. [Joseph] Addison.

The history of the modern sublime is rightly seen to proceed as follows. At the earliest stage of adoption in Britain, Longinus's sublime is primarily understood as a feature of excellent poetry, described as the irresistible affective transport or elevation of the hearer. This reflects the recognised prehistory of its Greek origin term *hypsous*, meaning height or loftiest, and its Latin counterpart *sublimitas*, also height, but literally, up to the line/lintel. This is associated with the rhetorical grand or high style, which is a persuasive mode of rhetoric that is designed to move strong passion in — in other words *heighten* — the hearer (Walker, 2015). Beginning with professional literary critic John Dennis (1658–1734), who is credited with the first English account of the sublime, there quickly emerges a Tradition of commentaries and debate on Longinus regarding poetry in Britain (Monk, 1935, pp. 44-45), see also (Ashfield & Bolla, 1996). While still appealing to Longinus throughout the century, discussion of the *sublime effect* as transport or elevation is eventually completely decoupled from its rhetorical origins to describe the response to the grand and terrible in nature. While Shaftesbury is usually credited with the first account of the aesthetically relevant *natural sublime*, Joseph Addison's (1672–1719) essays on the pleasures of the imagination (*The Spectator*, No.411–421, 1712 (Addison & Steele, 1965, pp. 535-558)) introduces an explicit category the *grand* that associates astonishing transport with greatness in physical nature. But it is not until Edmund Burke (1729–1797) that this notion of the grand is explicitly associated with 'terrible delight' (Burke, 1990, p. 34) and becomes the central concept of the *aesthetic sublime,* which is further advanced in Kant (1790).

It is on this narrative arc of the history of the sublime that historians of aesthetics are inclined — directly and indirectly — to hang the early eighteenth century development of the *concept of the aesthetic*. For instance: Shaftesbury's account of the sublime (broadly construed) is regularly appealed to as the original description of the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind. As already seen above, Stolnitz highlights Shaftesbury's sense of 'disinterestedness' as the first autonomous *concept of*

the aesthetic. Similarly, Cassirer (1951, pp. 312-319), Kivy (2003, pp. 20, 23-24), Townsend (1987), Guyer (2005), all pick out Shaftesbury as, in some way, the origin of the field of aesthetics, while Costelloe (2012a; 2013, pp. 11-21) and to some extent Beardsley (1966, pp. 178-183) directly locate the origin of aesthetics in Shaftesbury's account of the sublime. Although acknowledging Shaftesbury, as mentioned above, Hipple takes Addison's account of the sublime as the starting point of eighteenth century interest in aesthetic questions; whereas, with the aim to evaluate the current 'philosophical issues of the sublime,' Frances Ferguson appeals to 'the most significant portions of the development of the sublime.' She considers this to be 'the Burkean empiricist model and the Kantian formalist (or formalist idealist) account' (Ferguson, 1992, p. 1). However, it is Monk who advocates this developmental picture in its entirety.

Monk argues that there is a demonstrable line of intellectual development from the early eighteenth century English accounts of the sublime towards Kant's formalisation of it as an *aesthetic concept,* establishing a philosophically systematic *concept of the aesthetic*. Conforming to the conventional approach, Monk aims to identify and isolate the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind, and he takes Kant's *concept of the aesthetic* as the defining criteria of the aesthetic. Monk writes:

> … the æsthetic of Kant becomes of importance at the outset of this study as the summary of all we have to say here. It would be unwise to embark on the confused seas of English theories of the sublime without having some idea as to where we are going (Monk, 1935, p. 6).

Clearly, then, Monk's developmental account of the sublime traces an *arrow of knowledge* that progresses from disparate, undeveloped, even confused proto-*aesthetic concepts* to a refined distinct, autonomous *concept of the aesthetic,* culminating with Kant. In virtue of also employing the conventional approach, historians of aesthetics more or less repeat Monk's story of the development of the sublime as an *aesthetic concept*. And, regardless of how these histories of the *aesthetic sublime* attempt to expand,

complicate, or even abandon such a story, as seen in Monk or otherwise, they continue to draw a progressive developmental line that is in some way measured against Kant.

To demonstrate that the current histories of the sublime perpetuate a progressive picture of the *aesthetic sublime* under a criterion informed by the Kantian *concept of the aesthetic*, I now go into length how these accounts employ the conventional approach. (I discuss the implications of this approach in the next section §4 below.) Emily Brady's *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature* (2013) most closely repeats Monk's picture, in that Brady's discussion of early accounts is designed to culminate in Kant. Her motivation is to offer a philosophically robust understanding of human aesthetic experience of nature and advance her view of environmental aesthetics and ethics as the descendant of Kant's *natural sublime*. This follows from her stated aim:

> I seek to reassess, and to some extent reclaim, the meaning of the sublime as developed during its heyday in eighteenth-century aesthetic theory by the likes of Addison, Burke, Kant, and others, and mark out its relevance for contemporary debates in philosophy, especially for aesthetics (Brady, 2013, p. 2).

She further explains:

> In an attempt to distill the core meaning of the sublime for contemporary debates, I shall argue that the natural sublime is especially relevant. The reasons for this will become clear, but they grow out of a range of influential theories from the eighteenth century which largely focused on natural objects and phenomena.
>
> Among these theories, the Kantian sublime stands out as the most philosophically sophisticated and as having the greatest influence in philosophy. It is also a theory that, on most interpretations, focuses on nature widely understood — human and non-human nature. Given emerging work on environmental aesthetics, the sublime is especially relevant for extending and enriching these new discussions. Finally, the natural sublime should also be of particular interest to environmental ethics because of the ways it has been linked to both aesthetic and moral value (via Kant). As I shall argue, the core meaning of the sublime, as tied mainly to nature, presents a form of aesthetic experience which engenders a distinctive aesthetic-moral relationship between humans and the natural environment (Brady, 2013, p. 3).

Therefore, Brady takes Kant to be the measure and height of the eighteenth century *aesthetic sublime*, and the philosophical benchmark of the *concept of the aesthetic* looking both back and forward over the history of the sublime.

Similarly to Brady, in *Sublimity: The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics* (2005), James Kirwan aims to offer a better contemporary understanding of the *aesthetic sublime* that properly reflects its historical origins. He describes his approach as follows:

> In tracing the history of the sublime in terms of its phenomenological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions — what it is supposed to feel like, to signify, to do — we shall incidentally be tracing the course of modern aesthetics in general, from its beginnings as an essentially psychological study in the eighteenth century to its present markedly different… form (p. vii).

> The history of any aesthetic concept is, of course, necessarily a history of aesthetics. … What I [i.e., Kirwan] endeavour to demonstrate, however, is how certain attributed characteristics of the sublime, particularly with regard to its effect, were gradually transferred to the description of the aesthetic experience in general (Kirwan, 2005, p. viii).

Consistent with the conventional approach, and despite pointing to other philosophical kinds, Kirwan posits a necessary connection between the development of *aesthetic concepts* and the development of the *concept of the aesthetic*, where the *aesthetic sublime* exemplifies this connection. Although he does not explicitly introduce Kant's account as the defining *concept of the aesthetic*, Kirwan does delineate his history of the *aesthetic sublime* along the conceptually salient line that leads to Kant via Burke.

Literary critical theorists also appeal to the eighteenth century history of the sublime to better explain, understand, or relocate current ideas and debates. As mentioned above, in *Solitude and Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation*, Ferguson aims to identify the significant aspects of Burke and Kant's accounts of the sublime to address the current critical debate (1992, p. 1). Thomas Weiskel cherry-picks the history of the sublime to (re)invigorate the 'romantic sublime' as a form of human transcendence (Weiskel, 1976). In *The Female Sublime from Milton to*

Swinburne: Bearing Blindness, Catherine Maxwell revises the history of the sublime to identify a 'female sublime' in English literature that runs counter to its contemporary theoretical commentaries, notably Burke argues that the *aesthetic sublime* is masculine, with the aim to offer a new understanding of English poetry (Maxwell, 2001, pp. 2-3). In *The Sublime, Terror, and Human Difference*, Christine Battersby connects the *aesthetic sublime* that emerges from Burke, Kant, and Hegel with revolution to describe a political aesthetic that offers an explanation of twenty-first century political terror (Battersby, 2007, pp. 21, throughout). Again consistent with the conventional approach, these accounts identify, isolate, and then connect the *aesthetic sublime* with some current state of affairs. Without the ameliorative aims of the others just described, this is most clearly seen in Philip Shaw's *The Sublime*. To explain the current literary critical term, he traces the history of the *aesthetic sublime*, following the well-trodden eighteenth century route via Burke to culminate with Kant's formal account upon which future accounts up to the present are built (Shaw, 2006, pp. 72, throughout).

A number of recent histories of the sublime, however, express the aim to expand on, complicate, even go against the picture originally advocated by Monk. For instance, the 2012 collection *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, under the foil of resurrecting the *philosophical sublime* from apparent conceptual death, the collected essays 'offer…a fascinating narrative, in the warp and weave of which one discerns the deep, rich colors of a concept alive and well' (Costelloe, 2012b, p. 7). Nevertheless, Costelloe's introduction to the collection sets out the familiar narrative arc that maintains that the discussion of the rhetorical *sublime style* gives birth to the *aesthetic sublime*, which admixed with the *grand* is, via Burke, properly conceptually 'cemented' in Kant, and that the rhetorical and aesthetic completely 'uncoupled' under Romanticism (Costelloe, 2012b, pp. 4-7). Thus, the collection's essays that cover the philosophical history of the sublime are only adding depth and richness to the existing picture delineated by the conventional approach, which aims to identify the

aesthetic concept that anticipates or advances Kant's *concept of the aesthetic*. Similarly, Clewis aspires to expanding on the historical texts that describe the concept of the sublime; and thus, he has 'adopted the principle that an author need not use the word "sublime" in order to be in this collection' (2019, p. 4). In turn, Clewis's first selection criteria is:

> The reading will have primarily conceptual or theoretical content (rather than poetic-literary). Readings should tend to be more discourses *on* the sublime than discourses *of* the sublime (Clewis, 2019, p. 4).

But again, as evident from his pains to positively and negatively define the *concept of the aesthetic* and listing the elements of the field of aesthetics, his 'conceptual and theoretical content' is wholly guided by the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind.

Two recent books on the sublime both aim to elucidate why it received so much early modern attention that has ongoing intellectual impact. Firstly, in *The Theory of the Sublime From Longinus to Kant*, Robert Doran aims to answer: 'how did a term discussed in an obscure Greek fragment become one of the most important and consequential concepts in modern thought?' (2015, p. 2). In contrast to Monk's 'historical approach,' Doran describes his project as follows:

> The twofold aim of this book is to provide a detailed and analytical treatment of the key theories of sublimity, the first such comprehensive account in a single volume, while at the same time elucidating what it was about this concept that allowed it to play an outsized role in modern thought. Thus, although this book builds on the rich literature on the topic, it also departs from the typological or more localized approach that characterizes much of the scholarly engagement with the sublime, namely the taking of a particular period, aesthetic movement, author, or theme as a starting point (for example, the neoclassical sublime, the eighteenth-century sublime, the Romantic sublime, the natural sublime, the religious sublime, the rhetorical sublime, the aesthetic sublime, the Kantian sublime, and so on) (Doran, 2015, pp. 2-3).

Doran's systematic approach, then, is meant to identify an internally coherent 'theory of sublimity' that explains the common appeal to the sublime over the period's diverse viewpoints and contexts (2015, pp. 1-3).

On his approach, Doran isolates the role of transcendence as the unifying notion of the *aesthetic sublime*. He aims to argue:

> … that what unites the key theories of sublimity, such as they were understood and articulated during the early modern period (1674–1790), is a common structure — the paradoxical experience of being at once *overwhelmed* and *exalted* — and a common concern: the preservation of a notion of transcendence in the face of the secularization of modern culture (Doran, 2015, p. 4).

Nevertheless, his approach forms only a minor reorientation within the framework of the conventional approach. Longinus, Burke, and Kant remain the key figures of his study, and his addition of Boileau and Dennis is simply for the purpose of reinforcing the accepted developmental line that culminates with Kant (2015, p. 2). Thus, Doran maintains the anticipatory approach that relies on earlier accounts anticipating the accepted salient features of the later ones. When attempting to blur the line between aesthetics and literary criticism, he further applies the anticipatory approach by employing a *concept of the aesthetic* (i.e., his notion of transcendence) that can be seen in Longinus and anticipates Kant. All this has the familiar purpose of identifying the emerging modern sense of individual autonomy; that is, the modern 'subjective turn' marked by the shift 'from rhetorics to aesthetics' (Doran, 2015, pp. 15-19).

Secondly, in *The Sublime: Precursors and British Eighteenth Century Conceptions*, Karl Axelsson directly challenges Monk's explanation of why the sublime attracted eighteenth century attention. In particular, Axelsson argues against the general consensus derived from Monk that Boileau's translation and commentary form the conceptual 'turning point' that provokes the eighteenth century interest (Axelsson, 2007, p. 30). Axelsson goes on to write:

> The purpose of this book is, then, to bring the British eighteenth century sublime in contact with its past; and not the past that is usually thought to begin in 1674 (Axelsson, 2007, p. 14).

Instead he identifies the relevant 'past' involves looking at what he terms 'criticism of intellectual literature,' which appears to be the broader seventeenth century 'scientific and philosophic context' and not only the

literary critical discussion of the sublime. He writes:

> When referring to criticism of intellectual literature I shall concentrate on the arguments relating to the exercise of the imagination within such criticism (Axelsson, 2007, p. 16).

Thus, he aims to trace the *aesthetic sublime* in terms of the 'creative imagination' (2007, p. 13), which while inherited from Longinus, Axelsson argues that Thomas Hobbes (1588-1678) is the seventeenth century 'precursor' of this type of 'imagination' (p. 27). So as also seen in Guyer, Axelsson identifies 'imagination' as the relevant anticipatory *concept of the aesthetic*, which he aims to isolate in the broader pre-aesthetic literature; and thus, he repeats the conventional approach.

The most explicit challenge against the Kantian picture of the history of the sublime as initiated by Monk is made by Ashfield and de Bolla in the introduction to their anthology of eighteenth century texts on the sublime (1996). Their express aim is 'to de-couple the British eighteenth-century Tradition of the sublime from the Kantian analytic' (Ashfield & de Bolla, 1996, p. 3). In turn, they claim that the diversity of their selection of texts:

> … is a detachment from the scholarly Tradition that repeatedly told a story about the beginnings of aesthetics in eighteenth-century Britain in terms of the gradual shift towards the Kantian critique of judgement (Ashfield & de Bolla, 1996, p. 2).

Nevertheless, Ashfield and de Bolla's approach remains firmly entrenched in the conventional approach that I describe here. Their hope is:

> … that the extracts collected here demonstrate the fecundity of the British debate in its attempts to answer the question: 'what causes aesthetic pleasure?' (Ashfield & Bolla, 1996, p. 4).

As such, Ashfield and de Bolla take for granted that the sublime is essentially an *aesthetic concept*. Thus, their de-coupling from Kant is only with respect to what might rightly (or variably) constitute the *concept of the aesthetic* for the pre-Kantian British discussion of the sublime.

Ashfield and de Bolla maintain the necessary connection between the development of *aesthetic concepts* and the development of the *concept of*

the aesthetic. This is evident in their opening passages where they first declare that: 'The history of the concept of the aesthetic is yet to be written;' then highlight that 'modern scholarship has elevated the eighteenth-century Tradition of the sublime to the principal event in this long history' (Ashfield & de Bolla, 1996, p. 1). After raising the usual worries about anachronism, and claim that unlike the current field of aesthetics, the eighteenth century aesthetic goes beyond 'the artwork' to 'the nature of human experience,' they suggest that:

> … the problematic of the aesthetic, was known to the period in a number of ways but it is most fully explored under the rubric of the sublime (Ashfield & de Bolla, 1996, p. 2).

They also leave open the anticipatory picture that connects to Kant.

Having argued against an approach where 'pre-Kantian texts are read through the lens of the third critique,' with the *concept of the aesthetic* defined as 'disinterested,' Ashfield and de Bolla pose the counter claim:

> A case could be made that would directly counter this claim, that the above sketch might be characterised as a gross misreading of the Kantian text where the political and ethical constantly impress themselves on the surface of the third critique (Ashfield & de Bolla, 1996, p. 2-3).

Thus, the shift is only with regard to what might count as the relevant *concept of the aesthetic* that the early accounts anticipate, which, might impact the subsequent reading of Kant. As mentioned above in §2, (vi), Ashfield and de Bolla are not abandoning the conventional approach's Kantian measure, rather simply re-orientating it to suggest that an alternate *concept of the aesthetic* might be observed in earlier accounts and potentially complicate or expand on the reading of Kant's — indeed all subsequent —aesthetic theory.

It should be now be completely clear that existing histories of the sublime commonly employ the conventional approach that aims to isolate the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind. Consistently, these histories of the sublime exemplify the historians of aesthetics' accepted view that the *concept of the aesthetic* arises out of an identifiable intellectual shift in the

understanding of *aesthetic concepts*, which, in turn, defines the field of philosophical aesthetics. And as long as the sublime is assumed to be an *aesthetic concept* that is identified and isolated by a *concept of the aesthetic*, any efforts to expand, complicate or go against this view, actually remain within the scope of the aesthetic. In virtue of the conventional approach necessarily drawing an anticipatory picture of *aesthetic concepts* in the history of the *concept of the aesthetic*, the centrality of Kant as the standard measure for the history of aesthetics is reinforced. Having established the employment of the conventional approach, I turn to how it influences the generally accepted existing picture of the history of the *aesthetic sublime*. And remembering that the history of the *philosophical sublime* is currently reduced to the history of the *aesthetic sublime*, this existing picture is meant to fully capture the early eighteenth century philosophical conception of the sublime.

§4 The Existing Picture of the Early Eighteenth Century Sublime: the Sublime Style versus the Natural Sublime

The existing picture of the history of the sublime currently advanced by historians of aesthetics can be sketched as follows. The earliest discussion of the sublime in English almost immediately bifurcates along two branches. One branch remains firmly entrenched in Longinus's rhetorical treatise *On the Sublime*. Originating in England with Dennis, this so called Longinian Tradition is generally taken to focus on the *sublime style* in poetry; that is, the rules or principles of poetic persuasion or strong passion of the high or grande style. In turn, the Longinian Tradition is taken to ground the field of literary criticism, and as such, is not (at least directly) relevant to the history of philosophical aesthetics, indeed history

of philosophy. Instead, historians of aesthetics claim that the branch that is relevant to the history of aesthetics is the *natural sublime*; so called because such accounts relate to the experience of physical nature. The grand, vast, powerful, terrible in nature, and its paradigmatic examples of rugged mountains and crashing oceans, pervades eighteenth-century philosophical accounts of the sublime. This delightful terror and the *grand* in nature becomes central to the philosophically significant formal aesthetic accounts of the *aesthetic sublime*, seen foremost in Burke and Kant.[14] Although entrenched in the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury is taken to mark a break from it, marking the first description of a distinct, autonomous *natural sublime* that rightly anticipates Burke and Kant's *aesthetic sublime*.

Despite being regularly posited by historians of aesthetics and literary criticism, the Longinian Tradition usually goes undefined, under-defined, or merely implied. My basic construal of the Longinian Tradition, here, is those accounts that directly and critically engage with Longinus's *On the Sublime*, which include commentaries on the sublime in poetry, along with discourse, and later fine art. On occasion I shall refer to members of the Longinian Tradition as a Longinian or Longinians. Occasionally, I shall also refer the Longinian sublime, to signify the sublime that is attributed to Longinus or the Longinian Tradition, where the general or theoretical sense is determined by context. In sourcing the relevant texts, I primarily follow the selections that appear in the 'Part 1 The Longinian Tradition' in Ashfield and de Bolla's collection (1996). Although my construal is consistent with Ashfield and de Bolla's selections, it is, nevertheless, important to look at how they actually describe the Longinian Tradition. Furthermore, how the Longinian Tradition is understood and generally delineated by historians of aesthetics.

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[14] As already seen, Monk appears to be the first to claim this (1935, p. 4, throughout). Historians of aesthetics' generally follow this developmental picture of the sublime. See, e.g., (Brady, 2013, p. 14; Cassirer, 1951, p. 312; Doran, 2015; Kirwan, 2005).

Ashfield and de Bolla identify Monk as the origin of the descriptor the Longinian Tradition (1996, p. 10). Yet Monk's account is only suggestive of what constitutes the Longinian Tradition within the popular and extensive eighteenth century reception of Longinus's *On the Sublime* (1935, p.10). He does exclude the mere pulp rhetoric of the time, pointing out that:

> The numerous treatises on oratory and rhetoric are almost without exception no more than summaries of Cicero, with Longinus and Quintilian thrown in, the whole perhaps plagiarised from the work of some Frenchman. With this static rhetoric we are no way concerned (Monk, 1935, p.12).

But beyond this, Monk's account is left open-ended. Instead, he moves straight on to describing the significant aspects of Longinus's 'sublimity' that are generally taken up by the period as a whole. Immediately next he writes:

> The abiding interest of Longinus for the eighteenth-century, and consequently for us, lay in his conception of the sublime that underlies sublimity of style and that is an expression of quality of mind. To write on the sublime style is to write on rhetoric; to write on sublimity is to write on aesthetic. The sublime style is a means to an end; sublimity an end in itself. It is this latent aesthetic aspect of *Peri Hupsous* that was Longinus's contribution to eighteenth-century thought (Monk, 1935, p.12).

Evidently, there is nothing here to suggest what distinguishes the Longinian Tradition within this general uptake.

Although utterly unclear, it might be extrapolated that Monk considers that the Longinian Tradition encompasses any accounts that directly and critically engage with Longinus's *On the Sublime*. In light of Monk's dismissal of the 'static rhetoric,' the serious Longinians necessarily discuss both the rhetorical *sublime style* and the 'latent aesthetic aspect of *Peri Hypsous*.' On Monk's view, these accounts from the Longinian Tradition must minimally exhibit the aesthetic features found in Longinus which Monk identifies as: a sense of 'energy' (p.13); an appeal to passion (p. 14); and relates the sublime to 'the inward greatness of soul' (p. 15). This, at least, appears to be the case for the pre-eminent Longinians, Boileau and

Dennis, who feature in Monk's narrative. Monk's distinction between *sublime style* as rhetoric and 'sublimity' as aesthetic has been adopted and perpetuated by historians of aesthetics. However, there is a general further shift to reduce the Longinian Tradition to be, by definition, wholly interested in the rhetorical *sublime style*. Although it is generally believed that this distinction is inherited from Monk, it is not obviously the understanding that he presents.

One example of this reduction of the Longinian Tradition to *sublime style* is implied by Ashfield and de Bolla. In summarising their selection of 'Part 1 The Longinian Tradition' in their Introduction to their anthology *The Sublime: a Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (1996), they write:

> Longinus exerted an enormous influence, partly due to his classical authority and partly due to the prestige of Boileau, not only on what has been understood as the 'rhetorical sublime' but also on the later associational theorists. In this respect it is useful to distinguish between theories of sublimity which return to rhetoric for exemplification and amplification and a coherent 'Longinian Tradition'. The former continues throughout the eighteenth-century debate while the latter, although primarily rhetorical in nature, in its specific connection to *Peri Hupsous* becomes less influential after mid-century (Ashfield & Bolla, 1996, p. 10).

Although their exact view remains unclear, Ashfield and de Bolla appear to endorse a Longinian Tradition that is meant to expand Monk's picture to allow for 'theories of sublimity which return to rhetoric' to 'continue throughout' the eighteenth century, but also reduces the early eighteenth century 'coherent' Longinian Tradition to be 'primarily rhetorical in nature.' Either way, the Longinian Tradition now focuses on the 'rhetorical sublime'; that is, discussion of the *sublime style*.

However, more recent histories of aesthetics largely take for granted that the Longinian Tradition is concerned only with the *sublime style* in poetry. For instance, in passing Brady mentions 'the Longinian Tradition of defining the sublime in terms of style' (Brady, 2013, p. 19). Costelloe equates the 'Longinian sublime' with the *'sublime style,'*

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contrasting it with the philosophically relevant 'aesthetic sublime or *sublimity*' (2012a, p. 52). Kirwan posits that:

> The Longinian Sublime was largely a matter of the power of rhetoric, and those who dealt exclusively with this power in terms of art tended to end up by identifying sublimity simply with excellence (Kirwan, 2005, p. vii).

In reference to the 'Longinian Sublime' being 'largely...rhetoric,' Kirwan indicates that he holds Longinus's *On the Sublime* to be primarily a text on the *sublime style* (as defined here). And that the Longinian Tradition — that is, 'those who dealt exclusively with this power in terms of art' — equate the term sublime to (presumably primarily poetic) excellence. Although this has echoes of Monk's exclusion of 'static rhetoric,' recall that Kirwan's aim is to determine 'phenomenological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions' of the *aesthetic sublime*. As such, there is no place for the 'rhetorical sublime' on this picture, not even in the sense endorsed by Ashfield and de Bolla. Primarily, this is because on the conventional approach advocated by Kirwan, the *aesthetic sublime* is necessarily connected to a *concept of the aesthetic*.

In virtue of holding that the Longinian Tradition is only concerned with the *sublime style*, historians of aesthetics deny that accounts of the Longinian sublime in poetry describe an *aesthetic concept*. Applying the conventional approach, the claim is that the Longinian accounts of the sublime do not appropriately anticipate the emerging philosophical *concept of the aesthetic*. In this way, they do not pass the conventional approach's standard of philosophical relevance. Instead, historians of aesthetics deem the Longinian Tradition to be relevant only to the founding discourse of literary criticism. Moreover, any philosophical substance that might be exhibited by the Longinian Tradition is understood to be only accidental to their literary critical endeavours, making these accounts irrelevant to philosophical aesthetics and in turn irrelevant to the history of philosophy. In contrast, Shaftesbury is attributed with initiating, if not naming and defining, the distinct *concept of the aesthetic* (Cassirer, 1951, p. 312; Costelloe, 2013, pp. 11-21; 2012b; Guyer, 2005, pp. 4, 8-12; 2014, pp.

30-46; Stolnitz, 1961b, 1961c; Townsend, 1987). Thus, his account of the sublime is taken to neatly fall within it. Timothy Costelloe makes this point when he writes:

> Shaftesbury … addresses for the first time various themes that crystallize in the nascent discipline of philosophical aesthetics. This is true of the sublime (Costelloe, 2012a, p. 51).

Significantly, Costelloe goes on to explicitly deny a place in this origin story of the *aesthetic sublime* to Dennis; who is recognised to offer the first account of the sublime in English and have the most developed and representative view of the Longinian Tradition. According to Costelloe, Dennis's 'concerns were primarily religious and lay not with sublimity as an aesthetic category in its own right' (Costelloe, 2012a, p. 51).[15] Thus, in Costelloe's delineation of what forms the relevant accounts of the *aesthetic sublime*, he not only excludes the *sublime style* but also a 'religious' sublime. Following the conventional approach, his criterion of the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind defines the *aesthetic sublime* as:

> … a particular kind of ecstatic experience or state involving feelings of elevation, transcendence, awe, fear, and shock, excited by being in the presence of something greater than oneself (Costelloe, 2012a, p. 52).

Here Costelloe indicates how demanding the conventional approach's criterion for philosophical relevance is; that is, relevance is determined by exhibiting or anticipating a certain *concept of the aesthetic*. Taken to its full conclusion, then, Costelloe is isolating the aesthetic at the exclusion of all other philosophical commitments or roles. Furthermore, having excluded 'religion' and presumably God, Costelloe's appeal to 'something greater than oneself' is picking out the grand and terrible in physical nature; that is, the *natural sublime*.

Historians of aesthetics commonly appeal to physical nature as a basic criterion of the *aesthetic sublime*, which demands that the relevant anticipatory accounts are of the *natural sublime*. This is rooted in the

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[15] For a full discussion of Dennis and the sublime in the eighteenth century in terms of religion see: (Morris, 1972).

conventional approach's assumption of the developmental arrow. As already seen, Monk relies on such an arrow to exploit the relationship between the *concept of the aesthetic* and *aesthetic concepts* to make his claim about Kant's systematisation of the field of aesthetics. And as I demonstrated, in light of the common employment of the conventional approach, historians of aesthetics in one way or another repeat an anticipatory picture of the history of the sublime. For instance, Emily Brady draws a developmental line from Burke, who is attributed with establishing the *aesthetic concept,* to Kant, who is credited with fully formalising the *aesthetic sublime* within a systematic *concept of the aesthetic*. Brady writes:

> Burke carves out a new direction for the sublime, as a fully fledged philosophical and psychological study in aesthetics which begins with a strong emphasis on our emotions and the physical effects of the sublime. As such, its starting point is the qualities of the sublime and our emotion, moving further away from earlier preoccupations and looking forward to even more thoroughly philosophical accounts such as Kant's (Brady, 2013, pp. 23-4).

Accordingly, for Brady the accounts prior to Burke that are considered to be relevant to this developmental picture are those that anticipate the significant features of Burke's and later Kant's account.

The most significant feature of both Burke and Kant is that their *aesthetic sublime* is a distinct experience of physical nature; that is, the *natural sublime*. In relation to this natural object of experience, Brady suggests that the locus of Burke's break from earlier accounts is his new association of the *natural sublime* with negative emotions. She writes:

> Burke's account certainly echoes earlier ones, but we immediately see that he presents a more troubled, violent sublime, where a cluster of negative, heart-stopping emotions — fear, terror, astonishment — are involved, in contrast to the more sedate sublime of the earlier theories (Brady, 2013, p. 24).

It is significant to recall that Brady's aim is to reclaim this seemingly outmoded eighteenth century *natural sublime* as grandeur in nature to advance her fresh, contemporary concept of the *aesthetic sublime*. Therefore, her criteria that the salient feature of the philosophically relevant *natural*

sublime are 'negative, heart-stopping emotions' elicited by the experience of physical nature directly advances her positive project. She implicitly contrasts this with the Longinian Tradition, which in virtue of discussing the sublime in poetry and an apparently 'more sedate sublime,' is not (at least directly) relevant to her anticipatory picture.

Taking the same anticipatory approach as Brady, Marjorie Hope Nicolson goes further to argue that this particular concept of the *natural sublime*, if not by name, actually entered British thought earlier than Boileau and Dennis with the seventeenth century Cambridge Platonists. Nicolson claims that:

> Awe, compounded of mingled terror and exultation, once reserved for God, passed over in the seventeenth century first to an expanded cosmos, then from the macrocosm to the greatest objects in the geocosm—mountains, ocean, desert… Scientifically minded Platonists, reading their ideas of infinity into a God of Plenitude, then reading them out again, transferred from God to Space to Nature conceptions of majesty, grandeur, vastness in which both admiration and awe were combined (Nicolson, 1959, p. 143).

Nicolson describes this response to physical nature as a shift from an interest in the metaphysics of 'space'[16] to 'the aesthetics of the infinite' (1959, p. 143). As an active follower of Cambridge Platonism but also being entrenched in the Longinian Tradition, Nicolson recognises Shaftesbury as the first to associate this particular, elevated, experience of physical nature with the rhetorical term sublime. His *natural sublime* is generally considered by historians of aesthetics to be the basis of the *aesthetic concept*, which is relevant to establishing philosophical aesthetics. So, instead of Dennis, Shaftesbury is generally held to be the British originator of the *aesthetic sublime* because he rightly anticipates the *natural sublime* distinguished by Burke, and later formalised by Kant.

Of course historians of aesthetics make exceptions to this anticipatory picture to include aspects of the Longinian Tradition as

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16 'Space' here refers to the physical dimension, covering all space in the universe. So in addition to our now common association of space with outer space it includes geographical earth.

relevant. Standardly, Longinus's basic description of the *sublime state* as affective transport or elevation is maintained and advanced; indeed, generally Longinus's *On the Sublime* appears as a starting point in any discussion of the history of the sublime. But certain features of the Longinian Tradition are also appealed to, specifically those aspects that anticipate the *natural sublime*. For instance, Dennis's references to 'enthusiastic terror,' along with his lists of terrible divine and worldly creatures as sources of the sublime are recognised as anticipating Burke's central association of the sublime with terror (Brady, 2013, p. 14; Doran, 2015; Kirwan, 2005, pp. 1, 7). Similarly, Dennis's description of his crossing of the Alps is thought to exemplify the early movement toward appreciating the sublime experience of physical nature (Nicolson, 1959, p. 276-80). However, any appeal to Dennis and the Longinian Tradition only works to reinforce the conventional approach's anticipatory picture — as evident in Doran, who writes:

> Dennis's singular emphasis on violent emotion represents the beginning of a bifurcation in the theory of the sublime, with one strand orientated toward the pathetic (terror, the irrational, the sensational) and the other toward the noetic (the mental, the intellectual, the rational), Burke being the primary exponent of the first and Kant of the second. Indeed, Burke's theory of sublimity would have been quite impossible without Dennis's emphasis on sacred terror, and Kant's association of sublimity with reason was in large part an effort to reclaim a viable idea of transcendence from irrationalism (Doran, 2015, p. 7).

Nevertheless, on such a selective and piecemeal appeal to a Longinian like Dennis, it necessarily ignores the role that the sublime plays in his commentary on poetry; thus, apart from incidental anticipatory aspects, the Longinian Tradition continues to be reduced to the *sublime style*, and deemed irrelevant by historians of aesthetics.

Clearly, the exclusion and apparent irrelevance of the Longinian Tradition from the history of the *aesthetic sublime* is the result of the conventional approach employed by historians of aesthetics. On this methodological convention, historians of aesthetics are commonly guided by the question: how do the earliest British accounts of the *aesthetic sublime*

anticipate the *concept of the aesthetic*? The existing picture drawn by historians of aesthetics that reduces the Longinian Tradition to the *sublime style* and excludes accounts of the sublime in poetry emerges from the aim to isolate the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind which identifies and prescribes the salient feature of the *natural sublime* — that is, a form of delightful terror elicited by the grand in physical nature — as the standard of philosophical aesthetics. On the conventional approach's anticipatory picture, then, Dennis and the Longinian Tradition, in virtue of being concerned with poetry, fail to anticipate the philosophically relevant *aesthetic sublime* defined by the *natural sublime*. On the face of it, this approach to and outcome for the history of the *aesthetic sublime* seems appropriate; the merely rhetorical *sublime style* has no place in any narrative of philosophical aesthetics. However, I challenge the historians of aesthetics' existing picture of the earliest discussion of the sublime in English in order to carve out a space for a broader history of philosophy approach to the history of the *philosophical sublime*.

§5 The Problem with the Existing Picture

The historians of aesthetics' existing picture offers a compelling account of the *natural sublime*'s relationship with the history of the *concept of the aesthetic* in the early eighteenth century. However, it offers a problematically reductive picture of the *philosophical sublime* during the period. It overemphasises the retrospective distinction between the fields of literary criticism and philosophical aesthetics. Basically, it takes any account of the sublime in poetry to be concerned with *sublime style* and the purview of literary criticism, while it takes those accounts associated with physical nature, that is, the *natural sublime,* to rightly anticipate the philosophically relevant *aesthetic sublime* that forms the field of aesthetics. At its most extreme the two are assumed to be mutually exclusive. And as

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I have demonstrated above, historians of aesthetics commonly take the extreme view. Against this distinction between interests and intellectual fields, the early eighteenth century discussion of the sublime makes little discrimination along such lines. For instance, Burke sees his project as determining the proper passions, principles, and objects of the sublime, which he explicitly states has its origins in Longinus. Importantly, he is addressing the preceding discussion of the sublime as an admittedly diverse yet a single intellectual conversation (Burke, 1990, p. 1). He makes no priority nor distinction between the literary and philosophical participants, including accounts that discuss the sublime in both poetry and physical nature.

It would be misleading to suggest that historians of aesthetics were not aware of the close relationship between the fields of literary criticism and philosophical aesthetics held by the eighteenth century thinkers. For instance, Ernst Cassirer observes the nature of this relationship when introducing his discussion of Enlightenment aesthetics. He writes:

> The union of philosophy and literary and aesthetic criticism is evident in all eminent minds of the [eighteenth] century; in no case is it simply an accident; it is invariably based on a deep and intrinsically necessary union of the problems of the two fields of thought (Cassirer, 1951, p. 275).

Despite observing such an intellectual union, Cassirer still conforms to the conventional approach, where he focusses on isolating the field of philosophical aesthetics from, amongst other things, literary criticism, especially the rhetorical *sublime style*. Thus, he employs the isolationist aim to identify the philosophically relevant *concept of the aesthetic* and leaves the apparent rhetorical discussion for literary criticism (Cassirer, 1951, pp. 275-278). This means that the eighteenth century relationship between poetry and philosophy goes largely unexplored, and usually treated as irrelevant. Unfortunately, as my above discussion of the conventional approach proves, this strategy continues to be repeated by historians of aesthetics.

Yet, the historians of aesthetics application of the conventional

approach to eighteenth century accounts of poetry and even rhetoric appears to run counter to their treatment of ancient discussions of it. For instance, although Aristotle's treatises on the nature of poetry and persuasion extensively engage in rhetorical style, they are read and accepted as relevant to the history of philosophical aesthetics; see, for instance: (Giovannelli, 2012, pp. 21-33; Kristeller, 1951; Pappas, 2001). Corresponding with this view of Aristotle, currently it is literary criticism — rather than philosophical aesthetics — that treats Longinus and the Longinian Tradition as describing both the aesthetic and stylistic aspects of the sublime. For example, although ultimately conforming to the conventional approach, on this particular point, Ashfield and de Bolla's brief introduction to the Longinian Tradition in their anthology *The Sublime* present a complex picture of Longinus's influence on eighteenth century Britain. It ranges across Longinus's sources of the sublime; the poetic genius and the capacity to elicit the sublime; the association of the sublime with ethics; the sublime in natural harmony; religious enthusiasm; along with the purely rhetorical (Ashfield & de Bolla, 1996, pp. 18-21), see also (Shaw, 2006, pp. 12-26). Treated in this way, making a retrospective hard distinction between the literary critical and philosophical aesthetic accounts in early British accounts of the sublime appears nearly entirely artificial.

The existing picture's sharp division of fields rests on its distinction between the *natural sublime* and the *sublime style*. Problematically, historians of aesthetics take this to be an exhaustive distinction for determining the philosophical relevance of early eighteenth century accounts of the sublime. In attempting to isolate the philosophically relevant *aesthetic sublime*, the picture further reduces it to the *natural sublime*. As it stands, the move from accepting certain accounts from the period (specifically, Burke and Kant) as aesthetic to those accounts *alone* determining the philosophically relevant features of the early eighteenth century sublime is taken for granted. To make this move clear: let the *philosophical sublime* be any account of the sublime of philosophical substance, aesthetic or

otherwise. Philosophical substance includes, yet is not limited to, descriptions of the sublime source, cause and effect, object, and features of experience, also any aesthetic, metaphysical, moral, epistemic, teleological, theological commitments or conditions. On the existing picture the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime* is only the *natural sublime*. Thus, Shaftesbury's *natural sublime* is credited with being the first philosophically relevant account because it is seen to best anticipate Burke and Kant, who both associate their *aesthetic sublime* with physical nature. Historians of aesthetics rely on physical nature to be the definitive feature of the *aesthetic sublime* which in turn is the standard criterion to determine an account's relevance. However, historians of aesthetics do not offer any clear reason to ground relevance in this particular feature over the alternative aspects or objects, specifically poetry, discussed during the period.

Most significantly, physical nature fails to definitively ground the philosophical substance of a historical account. Considering that the conventional approach aims to isolate the aesthetic, this criterion becomes unexpectedly permissive, potentially including the likes of Thomas Burnet's cosmogony *A Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684/89) and accounts from the period's emerging field of geography (Nicholson, 1959, pp. 269, throughout). The main problem, however, is that grounding relevance in physical nature prescribes what counts as philosophical substance prior to any consideration of the content of the early eighteenth century accounts. It follows that any early eighteenth century account of the sublime that is not associated with physical nature must automatically fall outside of philosophical aesthetics, and indeed philosophy. This means, in virtue of describing the sublime effect of poetry, the Longinian Tradition is by default excluded. The positive claim that it is only concerned with the *sublime style* is actually a retrograde explanation of its default exclusion. Equally, aspects of Shaftesbury's account that fall outside of or are deemed inconsistent with this reductive *natural sublime* are also excluded on this criterion. Yet, as already implied by Costelloe's reasoning for accepting Shaftesbury and dismissing Dennis, there is room for accounts of the

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philosophical sublime that are not reducible to the *natural sublime* associated with physical nature. Thus, the *natural sublime* is better understood as a non-exhaustive sub-set of the *philosophical sublime,* and not its definitive ground. Moreover, the distinction between the *natural sublime* and the *sublime style* is no longer clearly exhaustive. Indeed, any initial contrast will lie between the *philosophical sublime* and *sublime style*.

I propose a better picture.

§6 A Better Picture: the Sublime Style versus the Philosophical Sublime

From my challenge to the existing picture in the history of aesthetics emerges an alternative distinction between the *philosophical sublime* and the *sublime style*. To highlight the difference, the historians of aesthetics' current distinction and its implications are most clearly articulated by Costelloe, whom having referenced above, I now quote in full:

> We might distinguish here between the Longinian sublime or *sublime style* to describe a mode of written or spoken discourse and the aesthetic sublime or *sublimity,* which isolates a particular kind of ecstatic experience or state involves feelings of elevation, transcendence, awe fear, and shock, excited by being in the presence of something greater than oneself (Costelloe, 2012a, p. 52) original emphasis.

As representative of historians of aesthetics, Costelloe's philosophically relevant *aesthetic sublime* is identified and defined by the *natural sublime,* and contrasted with the *sublime style*. As I have just demonstrated above, the *natural sublime* is a non-exhaustive, sub-set of the *philosophical sublime*. It follows, then, that the *aesthetic sublime* is also a sub-set of the *philosophical sublime*. Significantly, this is in virtue of the *aesthetic sublime* being defined by a *concept of the aesthetic,* in this case reduced to the salient features of the *natural sublime*. Therefore, the *philosophical sublime* is not equivalent to or

identified by the *aesthetic sublime* because as defined it is not reducible to a *concept of the aesthetic*.

Within the scope of the *philosophical sublime*, then, early eighteenth century accounts of the sublime that are not associated with physical nature — particularly, the Longinian Tradition's discussion of poetry — might actually be of philosophical substance, and hence, relevant to the history of philosophy. To be clear: in present day philosophical discourse the *philosophical sublime* is equated with the *aesthetic sublime,* which is claimed by the field of aesthetics as an *aesthetic concept.* As such, it is currently assumed that history of the *philosophical sublime* falls entirely within the history of aesthetics, where it is reduced to the history of the *aesthetic sublime,* which is identified and isolated by a *concept of the aesthetic*. However, on my definition the *philosophical sublime* is any account of the sublime of philosophical substance, which might include but is not constrained nor even identified by a *concept of the aesthetic*. This leaves space for a broader picture the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime* to be relevant to the history of philosophy, if not the history of aesthetics. In contrast, I maintain that the *sublime style* is only concerned with the style rules of rhetorical persuasion, and remains philosophically irrelevant. However, unlike Costelloe and his fellow historians of aesthetics, I do not equate a 'Longinian sublime' and the Longinian Tradition with the *sublime style*. Instead, I suggest there is a *philosophical sublime* within the Longinian commentaries on poetry.

In fact the distinction that I outline here between the *philosophical sublime* and *sublime style* is first explicitly identified by Boileau in his commentary on Longinus. Boileau praises Longinus for describing *le sublime* — that is, what I am calling here the *philosophical sublime* — characterised by its striking affect; in contrast to *le style sublime* — that is, the *sublime style* as a classical doctrine of rhetorical persuasion. Towards the end of Boileau's Preface to his 1674 translation, he writes:

> It must be observed then that by the Sublime he [Longinus] does not mean what the Orators call the Sublime Style, but something

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extraordinary and marvellous that strikes us in a discourse and makes it elevate, ravish and transport us. The sublime style requires always great Words, but the sublime may be found in a Thought only, or in a Figure or Turn of Expression. A thing may be in the Sublime Style and yet not be Sublime, that is, have nothing extraordinary or surprising in it. (WB II, 7) [17]

In his 1693 commentary Boileau is seen to further deepen the distinction between the *sublime style* and the *philosophical sublime* (Kerslake, 2000, p. 55-9; Monk, 1935, p. 33-5; Pocock, 1980). His refined account emphasises the significance of simplicity of language; that is, the simpler the language, the more striking the affect (Kerslake, 2000, p. 46; Monk, 1935, p. 34).

To be clear historians of aesthetics often acknowledge Boileau as the origin of this distinction and in this regard I am merely following the orthodoxy. Significantly, though, the current appeals to and discussions of Boileau's account of *le sublime* by historians of aesthetics remain only in service of the existing anticipatory picture of the *natural sublime*, while literary critical accounts read it in terms of literary criticism, see for example (Doran, 2015, pp. 97-123; Kerslake, 2000, p. 42; Monk, 1935, p. 31; Pocock, 1980). For instance, Doran identifies Boileau's importance is that he introduces the sublime as a 'critical concept' (2015, pp. 98, 111). Doran goes on to identify the 'themes' in Boileau's critical theory that anticipate Burke and Kant's *aesthetic sublime* (p. 123). Within this existing picture, there is some debate over if Boileau is better understood as the interpreter of Longinus or the inventor of the modern Longinian sublime. For instance, recall that Axelsson aims to demonstrate that Boileau does not mark an intellectual 'turning point' for the history of the sublime (Axelsson, 2007, pp. 30-34), see also (Doran, 2015, p. 99). For my purposes here, these anticipatory questions and this analysis of Boileau are

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[17] As translated and quoted in (Doran, 2015, p. 111) for:

> *Il faut donc savoir que par Sublime, Longin n'entend pas ce que les orateurs appellent le style sublime: mais cet extraordinaire et ce merveil-leux qui frappe dans le discours, et qui fait qu'un ouvrage enlève, ravit, transporte. Le style sublime veut toujours de grands mots; mais le Sublime peut se trouver dans une seule pensée, dans une seule figure, dans un seul tour de paroles. Une chose peut être dans le style sublime, et n'être pourtant pas Sublime, c'est-à-dire n'avoir rien d'extraordinaire ni de surprenant. (TS, 70)*

of no interest, rather I am only highlighting that Boileau initially makes the distinction that I am describing, and it is known and taken up by the English speaking Longinian Tradition.

Two particular aspects of the Longinian Tradition in English reflect Boileau's discussion of Longinus's *On the Sublime*. First and foremost, Longinus's *philosophical sublime* has an irresistible affect; that is, the striking in poetry that, as Boileau describes, 'makes it elevate, ravish and transport us.' In these terms, the *philosophical sublime* in Longinus is the conceptual description of the genuine production of this affect, that is, the cause and related sources of this affective experience. Following Boileau, the English Longinian Tradition's main engagement with Longinus's *philosophical sublime* is the discussion of its cause. A widely held early eighteenth century English criticism of Longinus is that, while he admirably describes its effect, he fails to describe the cause of the *philosophical sublime*. As highlighted by William Smith (1711–1787) in his introduction to his popular English translation of Longinus's *On the Sublime*, Longinus's failing comes from his assumption that his reader knows the accepted ancient definition (Smith, 1739, pp. 1-2). In the English discussion of Longinus, Dennis is the first to employ this approach that aims to complete Longinus's account of the *philosophical sublime*. In particular, Dennis considers that his task is to define the Longinian *philosophical sublime* and determine its proper cause.

Here is Dennis's description of the criticism and approach to Longinus in full:

> Tho' methinks, it was a very great Fault, in so great a Man as Longinus to write a Book which could not be understood, but by another Man's Writings [i.e., Cecilius]; especially when he saw that those Writing were so very defective, that they were not likely to last. But tho' Longinus does not directly tell us what the Sublime is, yet in the first Six or Seven Chapters of his Book, he takes a great deal of Pains to set before us the Effects it produces in the Minds of Men ; as for Example, That it causes in them Admiration and Surprize ; a noble Pride, and a noble Vigour, an invincible Force, transporting the Soul from its ordinary Situation, and a Transport, and a Fulness of Joy mingled with Astonishment. These

are the Effects that Longinus tells us, the Sublime produces in the Minds of Men. Now I endeavour'd to shew, what it is in Poetry that works these Effects. So that, take the Cause and the Effects together, and you have the Sublime (CW1: 223).[18]

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, Dennis's cause of the *philosophical sublime* centres on God's divine nature eliciting the harmonious state of the human soul that is consistent with True Religion (CW1: 234, 251-66).[19]

Repeating Dennis's strategy, the Longinian Tradition generally aims to complete Longinus's project by establishing the proper cause of the *philosophical sublime*. For instance, Tamworth Reresby sets up his discussion of the sublime as follow:

> Longinus is the most ancient Author that is to be found upon this Subject, and he tells us, that the Sublime is that which forms the Excellency and the sovereign Perfection of Discourse. That which transports. That which produces a certain Admiration mix'd with Wonder and Surprise. That which raises the Soul, and inspires her with a more exalted Opinion of herself. These Expressions we see give a true Notion of the surprising Effects of the Sublime but we are still to seek for the true Cause of these Effects (Reresby, 1721, pp. 26-27).

Richard Blackmore explicitly goes further. He not only addresses Longinus's failings but also attempts to synthesise his view with Aristotle's account of poetry, tragedy, and rhetoric (Blackmore, 1713, pp. 9-16). Blackmore claims he is doing something new by performing his analysis of Aristotle, yet it appears quite common in eighteenth century literary critical discussion to question Aristotle's rules of rhetoric.[20]

Even accounts that seemingly focus entirely on the *sublime style* usually have in mind some sense of the Longinian *philosophical sublime*. For example, Jonathan Richardson's *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (1715) primarily draws a comparison between the features of *sublime style* in poetry and good painting, which makes it appear a philosophically thin account.

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[18] All references to Dennis are from the two volume critical works. (Dennis, 1939) In-line referenced (Volumes 1 and 2) as CW1: page number/CW2: page number.

[19] The full discussion of Dennis is in Chapter 2, §4.

[20] The reasons for this are related to the Ancients and Moderns debate, the relevant aspects of which I set out in Chapter 2, §1.

And his initial definition and continual variations of the sublime as 'the most excellent of what is excellent' (1715, pp. 227, 247), seems to be exactly what Kirwan (initially quoted above) has in mind when he states that 'those who dealt exclusively with this power in terms of art tended to end up by identifying sublimity simply with excellence' (2005, p. vii). Nevertheless, Richardson attempts an argument to explain the greatness of thought required for the human mind to produce the *philosophical sublime* in artworks; notably the nature of the creator mind of God, and God's capacity to inspire great thought in Moses (1715, pp. 228-231). He then goes on to set out the role of painting in causing the sublime effect, and again not simply as prescribed style rules but as demonstrative instances of the *philosophical sublime* (1715, pp. 247-57). Clearly, then, the distinction between the *philosophical sublime* and the *sublime style* is recognised and utilised within the Longinian Tradition (how successfully is another question entirely).

Secondly, following Boileau, in the English Longinian Tradition the *philosophical sublime* is explicitly distinguished from classical rhetoric's *sublime style*, also referred to as high style. Formalised in ancient Roman rhetoric,[21] there are three recognised levels of style, each having distinct rhetorical aims: the low or plain is to teach or explain; the medium is to please; and the high or grand is to persuade by moving strong passion. Each level conforms to certain style rules. Boileau's comment 'what the Orators call the Sublime style' is referring to the classical high style; his modern association of the term sublime follows from the sublime's original Greek term *hypsous* and its Latin counterpart *sublimitas*, both literally meaning height, often translated as lofty. Throughout the Longinian Tradition, then, the *sublime style* is typically referring to the emotive high style, and its associated rhetorical rules of persuasion. As Boileau puts it, the rhetorical *sublime style* (meaning high style) is

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21 Although there are aspects present in the preceding Greek rhetoric, Cicero is usually credited with establishing the levels of style. With regard to the eighteenth century usage, see, for instance, (Monk, 1935, pp. 10-13, 43-45; Doran, 2015, pp. 31, 32).

associated with 'great Words', and simply employing these persuasive style rules need have 'nothing extraordinary or surprising in it.' In the hands of the English Longinian Tradition this *sublime style* is further identified with pomposity and overwrought language, and is routinely mocked as the *false sublime*.[22]

Most significantly, though, the Longinian Tradition generally holds that while it is possible for both the *sublime style* and the *philosophical sublime* to correspondingly appear in poetry, the rhetorical rules of persuasion are not the *art* that produces the genuine *philosophical sublime*. Explicitly, the *sublime style* does not cause the proper affective experience of the *philosophical sublime*. In this context of the pre-aesthetic, pre-fine arts or at least the early stages of their establishment, *art* retains much of the ancient sense that casts it (paraphrasing Kristeller) as broadly a kind of human activity, including craft and science (1951, p. 498), and practised as a technique (*techne*). Thus, merely conforming to the rules does not constitute the art of producing the *philosophical sublime*. Instead the art of the *philosophical sublime* is the proper cultivation of true human nature to have great thoughts. This is because the *true sublime*, that is, a genuine instance of the *philosophical sublime*, resides in the greatness of thought and the genuine expression of it, which follows from Boileau's claim that 'the Sublime may be found in a Thought only, or in a Figure or Turn of Expression.' As will be fully argued in Chapter 2, the Longinian Tradition ultimately understands the *philosophical sublime* to be a capacity of mind and a certain creative state of the soul that is only attained by the best and wisest characters — the *sublime genius*. In turn, it will be seen that the *sublime genius* is the proper character to imitate in the art of character cultivation.[23]

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[22] This will be further discussed in the subsequent chapters, particularly Chapter 4.

[23] Robert Doran points out that Boileau has interpretive purpose in describing the 'heroic life and character of Cassius Longinus' (2015, p.108); that is, the connection between the virtuous character of the producer and the goodness of the product is made, that is, the greatness of mind present in it.

To briefly return to the historians of aesthetics' existing picture, the overly reductive distinction between the *natural sublime* and the *sublime style* currently leads to an adverse understanding of *nature* and *art* in the early eighteenth century discussion of the *philosophical sublime*. Recall, on this existing picture the relevant sense of nature is treated as equivalent or reducible to physical nature. And consistent with my discussion in §4 above, similarly art is reduced to human creative production of fine art, which in the case of poetry is further reduce to the technique or practice of applying the rules of *sublime style*. In turn, historians of aesthetics deem that only the discussion of physical nature is philosophically relevant, and art in virtue of being the rules of the *sublime style* irrelevant. However, in line with the early eighteenth century distinction between the *philosophical sublime* and the *sublime style*, the Longinian Tradition explicitly denies that art in relation to the *philosophical sublime* is the rules of the *sublime style*; in fact, the *sublime style* is aligned with the *false sublime*. In further contrast to the existing picture, the Longinian Tradition understands the *philosophical sublime* in terms of human nature (not physical), which requires the art of imitative cultivation of character.

Overall, then, in light of the eighteenth century appeal to a Longinian *philosophical sublime*, any relevant distinction between the Longinian Tradition's discussion of the sublime in poetry and the *natural sublime* occurs within the scope of the *philosophical sublime*. Considering that the *philosophical sublime* encompasses all philosophical substance evident in such accounts, historians of aesthetics' conventional approach that only isolates the aesthetic is no longer adequate for delineating the full picture of the early eighteenth century discussion. Thus, the methodological question turns from anticipating the *concept of the aesthetic* to: what is the *philosophical sublime*? Also it can no longer be assumed that salient features of the *natural sublime* described by Kant via Burke form the criteria to determine philosophical relevance. Instead, taking the *philosophical sublime* in its broadest sense of any theory or theoretical description of a concept of the sublime, there are no criteria being imposed to identify and isolate a

singular, especially anticipatory, aesthetically relevant sense. Indeed, pursuing this new methodological question might reveal a multiplicity of branches of the *philosophical sublime* that fork, entwine, and offshoot from the accepted root in Longinus; and this gives grounds to reconsider if the Longinian Tradition is rightly one of these branches.

§7   But isn't the Longinian Tradition Still Just Rhetorical Style over Philosophical Substance?

From my initial gloss of the Longinian Tradition, I have demonstrated that it introduces the distinction between the *sublime style* as the rhetorical high style and the *philosophical sublime* that is concerned with the affective experience initially described by Longinus as irresistible transport. Significantly, the Longinian Tradition claims that its interest lies in the *philosophical sublime*. Currently, where historians of aesthetics accept and even appeal to this distinction originating from the Longinian Tradition, it is only in the context of advancing the historians of aesthetics' existing picture of the *natural sublime* that results from their employment of the conventional approach, recall, for example, (Doran, 2015; Monk, 1935). Yet, even if historians of aesthetics generally accepted both that the Longinian Tradition first articulated the distinction, and that the *natural sublime* is a non-exhaustive subset of the *philosophical sublime*, they are likely to continue to deny that Longinian accounts of the *philosophical sublime* are of actual philosophical substance. In keeping with Kirwan's observation, they might still conclude that descriptions of the Longinian sublime mostly boil down to a philosophically thin sense of the sublime as 'excellence' in poetry, or perhaps end up just being a set of philosophically irrelevant rhetorical principles.

While I do not deny that initial discussions of Longinus exhibit elements of conceptual confusion and underdevelopment, I suggest that the general charge of philosophical thinness as grounds to exclude the Longinian Tradition is an ongoing prejudice of the conventional approach. By advancing a Whiggish 'principle of progress,' it simply presupposes that this early discussion of the sublime is inherently nascent, automatically denying these early accounts certain philosophical sophistication. However, in the interests of the history of philosophy it seems too hasty to dismiss the philosophically thin or weak as philosophically irrelevant. Even the philosophically weakest accounts of the Longinian Tradition might still prove relevant to understanding the philosophically robust early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime*. But, there is a stronger reason that the historians of aesthetics continue to deny the Longinian Tradition philosophical relevance. The claim is that the theoretical or conceptual aspects of the apparent Longinian *philosophical sublime* are taken to fall under the domain of literary criticism, not philosophy. This arises from historians of aesthetics' explanation of the intellectual shift of the term sublime from poetry to philosophy and the establishment of the distinct fields of literary criticism and philosophical aesthetics. Although I argue that this view is again the result of the conventional approach, it is important to go through the historians of aesthetics' understanding of the terminological domain shift to see why my argument against this approach holds.

Historians of Aesthetics' Terminological Shift of the Sublime from Poetry to Philosophy

During the sublime's eighteenth century development, it undoubtedly undergoes a shift from the domain of poetry to philosophy. And the early eighteenth century reception of Longinus's *On the Sublime* does indeed play a formative role in founding both the fields of literary criticism and philosophical aesthetics. A significant factor in explaining this shift results

from how the distinction between the *sublime style* and the *philosophical sublime* is attributed and then traced onto the literary criticism and philosophical aesthetics. As I have described above, on the existing anticipatory picture, historians of aesthetics (and to a large extent historians of literary criticism) claim that literary criticism arises (in part) out of the critical analysis of poetry (or discourse), initially with Dennis and throughout the Longinian Tradition. It is further claimed by historians of aesthetics that Dennis and the Longinian Tradition are overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, interested in the rhetorical principles of *sublime style*. In contrast, historians of aesthetics attribute the first accounts of the *aesthetic sublime* as those that anticipate the salient feature of the *natural sublime* (specifically, delightful terror elicited by physical nature). These accounts that anticipate the natural sublime are further attributed with describing the *concept of the aesthetic* that establishes the field of philosophical aesthetics.

On this anticipatory picture, then, historians of aesthetics single out Shaftesbury's *natural sublime* as the initial move away from the Longinian Tradition's *sublime style* towards a truly *philosophical sublime*, keeping in mind that historians of aesthetics reduce the *philosophical sublime* to the *aesthetic sublime*. I return to Costelloe. Having just identified Shaftesbury over Dennis as the originator of the *aesthetic sublime*, Costelloe admits 'Shaftesbury's writing still bears the stamp of Augustan criticism and the Longinian Tradition,' and notes where he takes Shaftesbury to intersect with the Longinian Tradition (2012a, p. 51). After this, Costelloe describes the shift of the sublime that Shaftesbury is meant to instigate:

> It would be a mistake, however, to confine Shaftesbury's treatment of sublimity to the context of Longinian criticism, because, although his aesthetics focuses ostensibly on the category of beauty, he at once articulates the *concept* later writers call the sublime. We might distinguish here between the Longinian sublime or *sublime style* to describe a mode of written or spoken discourse and the aesthetic sublime or *sublimity*, which isolates a particular kind of ecstatic experience or state involving feelings of elevation, transcendence, awe, fear, and shock, excited by being in the presence of something greater than oneself…[T]his difference

is articulated explicitly by Addison and echoed later in Reid and Reynolds, all of whom speak of the aesthetic sublime as "great" or "grand" and reserve "sublime" for the Tradition of Longinus (Costelloe, 2012a, p. 52) original emphasis.

Costelloe's description aptly summarises the general view advanced by historians of aesthetics. He expresses two related aspects of Shaftesbury's account that historians of aesthetics use to explain the sublime's shift in domain.[24]

The first aspect is articulated by Costelloe's distinction between the *sublime style* and 'sublimity.' On his description, he associates the *sublime style* with 'a mode of written or spoken discourse.' While he defines sublimity, that is, the *philosophical sublime* as 'a particular kind of ecstatic experience.' As is consistent with the historians of aesthetics' existing picture, Costelloe goes on not only to identify this distinction in Shaftesbury but also to attribute him (by implication) with being its originator. According to Costelloe, on one hand, Shaftesbury's explicit understanding of the sublime remains in 'the context of Longinian criticism,' on his view that is the *sublime style*; on the other hand, implicit to Shaftesbury's discussion of beauty, he first 'articulates the *concept*' that becomes the *philosophical sublime*. Representative of the existing anticipatory picture, then, Costelloe locates the emergence of the relevant distinction between the *sublime style* and the *philosophical sublime* wholly within Shaftesbury's philosophy. Although Costelloe correctly identifies the relevant eighteenth century distinction he is mistaken to locate its origin in Shaftesbury. As I have argued above, it is first found in the Longinian Tradition. However, even if Costelloe granted the Longinian origin of the distinction, he would still deny philosophical relevance to any version of the Longinian *philosophical sublime*. This is because Costelloe

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[24] To be clear here I am concerned with the accounts that generally hold a version of this picture; for instance (Monk, 1935; Guyer, 2005; also Costelloe, 2013) (Cassirer, 1951). I accept that some history of aesthetics accounts of this period do not appeal to Shaftesbury in this way; for instance (Hipple, 1957; Brady, 2013; Doran, 2015). Nevertheless, I consider that my reading of the claim about Shaftesbury is consistent with, often implicit to, the general picture in the history of aesthetics.

connects Shaftesbury's *natural sublime* with the occurrent eighteenth century conceptual discussion of the 'great or grand.' This is where Costelloe further connects 'something greater than oneself' with Addison's (and other's) sense of greatness in physical nature.

The second significant aspect illustrated by Costelloe, then, is that historians of aesthetics directly correlate the philosophically relevant *philosophical sublime* with the emerging experiential category of the *grand* (and its variants, including the *great* and magnificent). As Costelloe indicates, this terminology and conceptual discussion can be seen in Addison, who introduces an explicit 'aesthetic category' of *greatness*. Appearing in his famed essay series on the pleasures of the imagination in *The Spectator* (1711–12), Addison defines the 'great' to

> … not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a while view, considered as one entire piece…where we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of the sight, but with that rude kind of magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature (*The Spectator,* No. 412, 1712).

In Addison, the term *great* refers to the 'pleasing astonishment' of the physically awesome in nature (No. 412, 1712). Conversely, his occasional use of the term sublime primarily appears in relation to poetry and literary discourse; for instance, in his early *The Spectator* series of essays on 'wit,' that is, Nos. 58–63 (1711), and 'genius,' that is, No. 160 (1711) (Addison & Steele, 1965). This reflects an observable trend across the early eighteenth century to use the term *sublime* to refer to the *sublime style,* and the term *great,* perhaps more commonly the *grand,* to refer to the awesome in physical nature, that is, the nascent *natural sublime*.

The early eighteenth century discussion of the *grand,* or following Addison *greatness,* is associated with the emergence of the Grand Tour. It becomes a popular custom of the late seventeenth century British aristocrat to take a trip around Europe, with the standard itinerary going via France and Italy, aiming for Rome. While mimicking the preceding religious and intellectual pilgrimages along a similar path, the new Grand Tourist's purpose is cultural. As such, it forms part of the period's moral

education for the political man of letters. Lisa Colletta notes in her introduction to *The Legacy of the Grand Tour*:

> A tour of the Continent was seen as the ideal means of imparting culture, taste, knowledge, self-assurance, and polished manners (Collette, 1915, p. ix).

Significantly, it required crossing the Alps, which up until then had usually only elicited fear or terror from travellers due to being a physically difficult, genuinely risky, journey. However, with the improving transport and ease of travel that came with time and the increase in numbers, these Grand Tourists could indulge their interest in experiences for pleasure (cultural or otherwise). With this, the Alps began to provoke a new mixed passion of terrible delight.[25] Thus, the discussion of the *grand* aims to explain this newfound feeling of, in Addison's words, the 'magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature.'

On the historians of aesthetics' existing picture, these two early eighteenth century distinct senses of the sublime (in poetry, and the *grand*) are understood to develop in parallel. Historians of aesthetics commonly advance the overarching idea that although the two senses share a similar transporting effect, they are applied to different objects of experience (i.e., poetry and physical nature). And in turn, they are applied to different intellectual concepts (i.e., *sublime style* and *natural sublime*). They also are

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[25] Relevantly, Dennis was one of these Grand tourists, who had this sort of experience. He gives a representative description. His account is in *Letter describing his crossing the Alps, dated from Turin, Oct. 25, 1688*. He writes, for instance:

> The ascent was the more easie, because it wound about the Mountain. But as soon as we had conquer'd one half of it, the unusual heighth in which we found our selves, the impending Rock that hung over us, the dreadful Depth of the Precipice, and the Torrent that roar'd at the bottom, gave us such a view as was altogether new and amazing. On the other side of that Torrent, was a Mountain…Its craggy Clifts…thro the misty gloom of the Clouds…sometimes gave us a horrid Prospect. And sometimes its face appear'd Smooth and Beautiful… In the meantime we walk'd upon the very brink, in a litteral sense, of Destruction; one Stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy'd. The sense of all this produc'd different motions in my, viz. a delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled (CW2:380).

This passage is appealed to by, for example, (Brady, 2013, p. 14) following (Nicolson, 1959, p. 277).

seen to have distinct intellectual origins (i.e., the Longinian Tradition and the nascent aesthetic category, exemplified by Addison's *greatness,* respectively). There is some evidence of a trend in the early eighteenth century usage that the term sublime refers to the *sublime style* in the discussion of the rhetorical principles of poetry; whereas the emerging *aesthetic concept* that comes to be known as the sublime is instantiated by discussions of the *grand* and its various counterparts that describe the awesome in nature, especially the newly identified mixed passion of terrible delight elicited by, for instance, the Alps.

On the historians of aesthetics; view, the distinct usage indicates an accepted and thoroughgoing conceptual distinction between the term sublime and the *grand* present in the early eighteenth century discussion. Significantly, it is further held that this distinction between the sublime and the *grand* directly maps onto the *sublime style* and *philosophical sublime* distinction. As Costelloe's comments suggest the discussion of the grand is the concept that he takes to rightly anticipate his aesthetic 'sublimity.' Therefore, Costelloe and the historians of aesthetics conclude that even the participants in the Longinian Tradition would hold that the Longinian *philosophical sublime* reduces to the rhetorical principles of poetry and is distinct from the philosophically relevant accounts of the grand. Finally, on this picture, Shaftesbury's significance is that he applies what is seen as the Longinian rhetorical term the 'sublime' to the emerging philosophical *aesthetic concept* of the *grand*; basically, Shaftesbury is thought to apply an old term (sublime) to a new idea (*grand*).

The historians of aesthetics' claim that the shift of the term sublime from poetry to philosophy is located in Shaftesbury is most strongly made by Nicolson. She argues that Shaftesbury's account of the sublime belongs within the parallel developmental stream of the *grand,* where the *natural sublime* that is relevant to philosophical aesthetics emerges, and any reference to the Longinian Tradition's term sublime is a mere linguistic borrowing. As discussed above, Nicolson's view draws a line from the seventeenth century Cambridge Platonist's conceptions of

'grandeur' in the 'greatest objects in the geocosm' to *natural sublime* attributed to Shaftesbury (1959, p. 143). Nicolson argues that Shaftesbury is the first to connect the — until then exclusively literary term — sublime with the philosophical concept associated with physical nature. At the point in *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody, Being a Recital of Certain Conversations on Natural and Moral Subjects* where Shaftesbury applies the term sublime (*Characteristics*: 316), Nicolson observes that the term is 'so seldom on Shaftesbury's lips that it surprises' (1959, p. 294). Nicolson's noting of surprise is meant to indicate that Shaftesbury is instigating the terminological shift. On the historians of aesthetics view, subsequent to Shaftesbury's application, the term sublime becomes the dominant name for the putative *aesthetic concept* otherwise called the *grand*, etc. However, the problem with the historians of aesthetics anticipatory picture is that it never really considers *why* Shaftesbury might be applying the apparently literary term sublime to the new concept of affective experience of physical nature.

To ask 'why' is not a matter of assessing Shaftesbury's psychology; I am not suggesting that we ask him what he was thinking at the time. Rather, in the context of his philosophy as a whole, what role does the term sublime play, and in turn, *why* use it in that singular way in *The Moralists*? By following the conventional anticipatory approach, historians of aesthetics are indifferent to this contextualisation of Shaftesbury's usage because his relevance and related significance is retrospectively determined by the prescribed criterion that it describes an experience of physical nature that rightly anticipates the *aesthetic sublime*. On the behalf of historians of aesthetics, Nicolson might counter my objection by pointing out that the actual historical establishment of the *natural sublime* directly converges with the period's own distinct use of the sublime and the *grand*. But, Nicolson's picture only enriches the understanding of the *natural sublime*, which remains a non-exhaustive subset of the *philosophical sublime*. The historians of aesthetics' current view still confines Shaftesbury to a narrow conception of the *natural sublime*. As such, it overlooks a more

nuanced possibility. Even on Costelloe's and Nicolson's descriptions, it is at least equally plausible to conclude that Shaftesbury is bringing the parallel conceptual discussions of the sublime and the *grand* together. On this alternative, the shift from poetry to philosophy no longer appears merely terminological. Instead, it opens up the possibility that in Shaftesbury at least there is some sort of a conceptual union between the sublime attributed to poetry (as per the Longinian Tradition) and the *grand* affective experience of physical nature. Again this demonstrates that it is a mistake to reduce the *philosophical sublime* to the *natural sublime*.

Once more this problematic overly reductionist picture is the direct result of the historians of aesthetics' conventional approach. This time it is because the convention's anticipatory question overrides the original question of enquiry that these accounts are actually aiming to address. For instance, even the stalwart advocate of the general claim that Shaftesbury distinguishes the *concept of the aesthetic,* Stolnitz admits that 'Shaftesbury denies that there is anything peculiar to aesthetic phenomena' (1961c, p. 101). Or to put it another way, Shaftesbury never aims for nor is interested in distinguishing the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind. Despite the attempts to avoid or reduce anachronism, by following the conventional approach, and focussing on isolating how Shaftesbury's *natural sublime* anticipates the philosophically relevant *aesthetic sublime* what his account is actually aiming for remains unknown. Importantly, the conventional approach cannot orientate Shaftesbury's *philosophical sublime* in relation to the role it plays in his philosophy, or the questions it is meant to address, or debates it is engaging with. The conventional approach cannot capture a full sense of his *philosophical sublime*. The same goes for the accounts of the Longinian Tradition. Thus, currently these accounts are not understood or discussed on their own terms nor in their original context. As such, there is potentially much more philosophical substance to be found in these early eighteenth century accounts of the *philosophical sublime*.

To be clear: the main problem with the historians of aesthetics' conventional approach and resulting anticipatory picture of the early eighteenth century sublime is that it is meant to be exhaustive of the philosophically relevant *philosophical sublime*. I do think that there is value in the purposeful and self-aware application of the conventional approach; it has produced many valuable histories of aesthetics, with perhaps the richest corpus being histories of the sublime. The problem is that it is currently the only approach to the *philosophical sublime*, indeed, to all concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics. Although the current philosophical histories of the sublime offer a sophisticated understanding of the eighteenth century development of the nascent *natural sublime* into the philosophically systematic *aesthetic sublime*, as I have argued here, it is too reductive to capture the full substance of the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime*. Therefore, it is my aim to attempt a new methodological approach, one that does not identify and isolate the aesthetic, but one that simply asks: what is the theory of the *philosophical sublime*? My approach falls within the broader history of philosophy, and tries to locate the *philosophical sublime* within its original context and philosophical role in the early eighteenth century. With such an ambitious new approach, I set it on a modest scope, focussing on Dennis and Shaftesbury. In the course of the following chapters I set out their *philosophical sublime* in contrast to the *sublime style*, and offer a philosophically significant picture of the sublime that shifts from poetry to physical nature.

Though I take up a familiar field, I set to plough an entirely new furrow, with the neighbour's untested share.

Chapter Two

John Dennis and the Longinian Tradition

In this chapter, I identify and discuss the *philosophical sublime* found in John Dennis and the Longinian Tradition. As I set out in Chapter 1 §4, my basic construal of the Longinian Tradition is accounts that directly and critically engage with Longinus's *On the Sublime*, which include commentaries on the sublime in poetry, along with discourse, and later fine art. Here I set out the central concerns and features of primarily Dennis's account. I focus on him for two reasons. One is that he offers the first and most developed account of the *philosophical sublime* that appears in the earliest stages of the discussion in English, engaging with the aspects of Longinus's *On the Sublime* that are of significance to and form the central concerns of the Longinian Tradition. The other reason is that Dennis's central texts, which discuss his *philosophical sublime* — that is, *The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry* (1701) and *The Grounds of Criticism* (1704) — are both published prior to the Third Earl of Shaftesbury's *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody, Being a Recital of Certain Conversations on Natural and Moral Subjects* (1709), where the term sublime is first applied to a certain experience of physical nature. Thus, Dennis is being discussed with the view to illuminate the nature of the shift of the *philosophical sublime* from poetry to physical nature.

As I established in the previous chapter, I am abandoning the historians of aesthetics' conventional approach that aims to identify and

isolate the *aesthetic concept* of the sublime. Instead I aim to describe the role and understanding of the *philosophical sublime,* that is, a theory or concept of the sublime that is of philosophical substance, which includes but is not limited to descriptions of the source, cause and effect, object, and features of the experience, along with any kind of philosophical conditions or commitments within such accounts. Thus, my question of enquiry is simply: What is Dennis's account of the *philosophical sublime?* Importantly, in the same way that I am not identifying and isolating the *aesthetic sublime,* I am not now aiming to identify and isolate the metaphysical, epistemic, moral sublime, or indeed, any other philosophical category, or combination, of the sublime. In abandoning these modes of philosophical classification, I do aim to understand the role of Dennis's and the Longinian Tradition's *philosophical sublime* in its socio-political and intellectual context. In particular, I attempt to identify the early eighteenth century concerns that these accounts are meant (in some way) to be addressing, in turn revealing the philosophical relevance of these accounts.

On my alternative history of philosophy approach, this chapter proceeds as follows. Firstly (§1), I point out the relevant political and intellectual context for the purpose of establishing the general political and intellectual question of enquiry that Dennis and the Longinian Tradition's accounts are operating under. With the shifts in political power between Crown, Church, and State in England, the central early eighteenth century concern is related to who has the right to rule and the appropriate political education of the new Augustan statesmen, the truly virtuous character. The question of education plays out in the Ancients and Moderns debate where the initial discussion of Longinus's *On the Sublime* emerges. Underscoring this political climate and debate is the general question: what constitutes the best and wisest character, our true human nature? Furthermore, how do we genuinely attain (educate) our true nature? Significantly, at the time, Longinus is generally advanced to as one such example of the 'best and wisest character,' along with *Peri Hypsous* being an appropriate source of education. So secondly (§2), I set out the Longinian

Tradition's appeal to Longinus. In particular, I go through his account of the *sublime genius* and discussion of art and nature, which becomes central to the early eighteenth century accounts. Thirdly (§3) I turn to Dennis's account of the *philosophical sublime,* where I establish that it is basically a certain harmonious state of the soul, attended by enthusiastic passion, caused by God's divine nature. Finally (§4), I set out the general view of the Longinian Tradition on God, nature, and art in relation to the *sublime genius*.

§1 The Central Political and Intellectual Question of Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century England

From this distance, it might appear perplexing why a previously unknown and unmentioned, fragmented, problematically attributed ancient Greek rhetorical treatise, arriving via a seventeenth century French translation, would be the one of the great talking points of eighteenth century England. Nevertheless, this was the case for *Peri Hypsous*.[26] Although rediscovered in sixteenth century Europe,[27] and already existing in English translation,[28] it is French critical theorist Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux's 1674 translation of it as *Traite du Sublime* that introduced the term 'sublime' to Britain, leading to its usual English translation as Longinus's *On the*

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[26] There has been ongoing contention over the origins, dates, and author of the ancient text *Peri Hypsous*. For the most recent view on this see (Heath, 2000, 2012).

[27] Franciscus Robertello edited the first 1554 edition of the Greek text in Basel, and Paulus Manutius published another in 1555 in Venice. For a brief history of the rediscovery *Peri Hypsous* and its introduction to England see (Monk, 1935, pp. 18-20).

[28] John Hall's English translation appeared in 1652 as *Peri Hypsous, or Dionysius Longinus of the Height of Eloquence rendred out of the originall by John Hall esq.*

Sublime,[29] while Boileau's influential 1693 commentary on the treatise initially defined the Longinian Tradition's philosophical conception of it.[30] And while it may not diminish the perplexity of his appeal, it is significant that Longinus emerged as an instrument in intellectual Europe's Ancients and Moderns debate.[31] Basically the quarrel was over whether or not ancient poetry and knowledge are superior to modern forms. Initially employed by Boileau in his commentary to defend the ancients (Levine, 1991, p. 127), Longinus was appealed to by all sides of the Ancients and Moderns debate, especially in England amongst the Longinian Tradition (Monk, 1935, pp. 25-6, 33); in general, he was advanced as an exemplar of the best human character.

To be clear, this gloss on the seventeenth century European (re-)introduction and uptake of Longinus's *On the Sublime* is only meant to indicate that Longinus was directly appealed to within the Ancients and Moderns debate. Unlike Karl Axelsson (2007), I am not identifying the 'cause' of the late seventeenth century attraction to the sublime. As such, I am indifferent to whether or not Boileau's role marks a 'turning point' in the development of the concept of the sublime. And I am also indifferent to whether Axelsson is right to suggest that the 'creative imagination' apparent in broader 'intellectual literature,' particularly that of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1678), 'causes' such an attraction (Axelsson, 2007, pp.

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[29] The most popular eighteenth century English translation is William Smith's, with five known editions of his *Dionysius Longinus On the Sublime: Translated from the Greek, with Notes and Observations, and some account of the Life, Writings, and Character of the Author*. Although Smith's title refers to Dionysius, he (along with fellow eighteenth century thinkers) considered the author of *Peri Hypsous* to be the historical figure Cassius Longinus.

[30] For discussion of Boileau and his eighteenth century influence see (Kerslake, 2000, pp. 41-64; Monk, 1935, pp. 29-36).

[31] To be clear about usage throughout: Uppercase full phrase Ancients and Moderns refers to the early modern debate and its participants in general. Lowercase ancient or modern refers to someone from that actual period; for example, the ancient Homer, and the modern Swift. Uppercase Ancient refers to an early modern debater who defends the view that the ancients are superior, for example, the Ancient Swift; whereas Modern refers to an early modern debater who defends the view that the moderns are superior, for example the Modern Wotton.

11-30, 53, throughout). Equally, my discussion of the appeal to Longinus in the Ancient and Moderns debate does not necessarily answer Robert Doran's similar anticipatory question, that is:

> … how did a term discussed in an obscure Greek fragment become one of the most important and consequential concepts in modern thought? (Doran, 2015, p. 2).

I am also indifferent to what it might be, as Doran puts it, 'about this concept that allowed it to play an outsized role in modern thought' or if his sense of a 'unified discourse' forms an explanation of it (2015, p. 2). Instead, I am interested in locating the Longinian Tradition's discussion of Longinus within its broader discussion and issues during the period, which is initially and explicitly seen in the Ancients and Moderns debate.

The Ancients and Moderns Debate

Even the ancients themselves questioned if their contemporary thought surpassed that of their own seemingly distant predecessors; still, this perennial question appears most actively fought over in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Europe. According to Joseph M. Levine's history of the Ancients and Moderns debate, during this time:

> … there was hardly a field of human endeavor that was untouched by the dispute, and indeed everywhere, from architecture to zoology, there was squabbling (Levine, 1991, p. 121).

It was predominantly debated in France where it was generally referred to as the *querelle* and also in Britain where following Jonathan Swift's parody it is immortalised as the *Battle of the Books* (written 1697, published 1704). In Britain, the debate is initiated by Sir William Temple's 1690 essay defending classical life and thought, and William Wotton's extensive response to it that favours modern advancement. Swift retells these British beginnings and the ensuing squabble in terms of the books old and new of Saint James's Library literally flying off the shelves into battle (Swift, 2010 [1704], pp. 137-164). Although Swift's partisan tale heralds the ancients' triumph, as Levine observes 'it pretty much ended up in a draw' (1991, p.

2). Levine further observes that the moderns largely agree that the best literature and the arts is imitative of the superior poetry and rhetoric of the ancients, while the accumulated knowledge in modern science and philosophy has the advantage over the ancients' understanding (p. 2). The period's unprecedented fervour over this question is perhaps best understood in its political context.

Seventeenth Century Politics

As the aftermath of the English civil war (1642–51) plays out — with the monarchy being restored in 1660 and then revolutionised in 1688 — turn of the eighteenth century England experiences an irreversible move away from the complete authority of Crown and Church toward State rule. This raises three interrelated and hotly contested political concerns during this time. The first concern is the constitutional role, and extent of authority of the Crown over parliament and state. The second concern is the role, and authority of, the Church in society, especially over freedom of worship but also civil life. The third concern is, in the wake of ongoing civil unrest, what constitutes the proper social hierarchy required to maintain order in civil society. Political debate and parliamentary acts around Crown and Church authority were mainly in terms of the monarchy's succession and associated religious doctrine. For instance, during the reign of William III and Mary II, in 1689 the Bill of Rights set out new civil rights and limited certain powers of the Crown. In the same year the Toleration Act largely over-ruled the 1662 Act of Uniformity that prescribed and enforced the high Anglican rights of the Church of England to allow non-conformist freedom of worship; yet, significantly, it continued to deny Catholics (along with non-trinitarians, and atheists) to suppress the threat of James II. In 1701 the Act of Settlement established the legal order of succession of the Crown in England, amongst other things prescribing that monarchs must be Protestant (see, for instance (Coward & Gaunt, 2017, pp. 391-438)).

With these political and religious shifts, for the first time in England's history there are political parties — Tory and Whig — representing the opposing views in State affairs. As W. A. Speck describes, basically the Tories held that the monarch had 'divine indefeasible hereditary right' while the Whigs countered that there is an 'implicit contract between king and subjects' that supported mixed rule (1998, p. 4). Speck calls the associated ideological period as the 'Age of Party' (that is, 1680–1720); during which the political disagreement between the opposing Whig and Tory parties is over the 'nature of the constitution in church and state and on the social hierarchy in maintaining it' (1998, p. 7). At their (derogatory) extremes a Tory — originally a term for 'Catholic Bandits' — is a papist who defends absolute monarchy (specifically, the deposed James II); whereas, a Whig is a non-conformist (Protestant, not of the High Anglican Church of England) republican. While their caricatures constituted treason, in actuality the majority of political participants were moderate High Anglicans (pp. 17-27). Significantly, Speck highlights that each of the party's arguments for their respective views rested on differing interpretations of English history (1998, pp. 5-7), which reflects the Ancients and Moderns debate's deep worry, as Levine puts it, of 'how to understand, reconstruct and use the past' (1991, p. 7).

Moral Education: How to Cultivate the Best and Wisest Human Nature?

The shape of the Ancients and Moderns debate is underscored by these three political concerns of the period. Firstly, with the move away from the complete authority of the Crown, it raised the question of how to, and significantly *who* might, rightly govern civil society? In reality any seventeenth and eighteenth century shift in social hierarchy was minimal, with the *who* only consisting of the established members of the ruling class. As such, parliament was made up of the existing aristocracy, who claimed membership of or some association with Court. For instance,

Anthony Ashley Cooper, First Earl of Shaftesbury (1621–1683), leading Whig and influential grandfather of the Third Earl, often acted radically against the Crown, yet gained and maintained most of his political leverage through being born into landed gentry and his associations with members of Court (Harris, 2008). Within the aristocratic social circle, along with aspirants to it, any right to govern is viewed and debated as a moral question of character. It is further thought that the just governance of State comes through the statesman's just governance of self, which is the product of the proper moral development of character, our true human nature. Emphasising character development, political and intellectual concern turns to: what is the correct moral education? For this reason, Levine argues that the 'best background to the battle of the books is therefore the history of education under the Tudors and Stuarts' (1991, p. 6).

In term of the Ancients and Moderns debate, there was general agreement amongst moderns that the classics offered the best political and moral education. Levine remarks that this arises out of a perceived, yet not entirely illusory affinity 'between the conditions of ancient political society and modern Europe' (1991, p. 6). Primarily remembered as literary movement, the Augustan Age has eighteenth century politicised men of letters styling themselves on the literature, and the geniuses who produced it, of the original Augustan statesman of the Roman Empire, especially Virgil and Horace (for full discussion see, e.g., (Rogers, 1974)). The moderns' appeal to the ancients is also extended to the Greek exemplars, such as Homer and relevantly Longinus. Conversely, natural philosophy and the emerging science is generally accepted to be cumulative, making the modern knowledge the right educational source of it. For the moderns, then, poetry and literature and the associated literary criticism has significant moral, political, and social ramifications; that is, it is the imitation of the classics that forms proper instruction of moral character. Thus, determining what genuinely constitutes the best sort of poetry and literature, and the capacity to properly judge it to be the best, plays an

important role in identifying the best and wisest characters. This is in order to establish who to imitate in developing good judgement and character, and consequently, identifying the right sources of education to become the proper governing statesmen (it is always men).

Secondly, with the diminishing influence of the High Church of England and the growing notions of religious toleration,[32] the nature of the (biblical) God and True Religion becomes a topic of discussion within intellectual and polite society. Thus, there appears a move away from religion as the accepted theological doctrine dictated from the pulpit and enshrined in Church, and indeed parliamentary, law. As the term suggests, True Religion is meant to identify the genuine conception of God, and which religion, more correctly denomination, holds and offers the proper worship of this true conception. Although True Religion always refers to Christianity, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century Anglicans, Protestant non-conformists, and Catholics alike applied it, usually polemically, to proclaim the superiority of their particular religious doctrine and practice, and to denigrate the others. One example of this is John Milton's 1673 polemic *Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration; and what best means may be used against the Growth of Popery* (Milton, 1673). Again despite the fervour of the debates, in actuality the doctrinal differences are often negligible as most participants express versions of moderate high Anglicanism. Ancients and Moderns, then, argued over the nature and extent of literature, philosophical knowledge, and learning in the understanding of religion. Indeed, the value of poetry and natural philosophy is commonly understood as representing or analogous to the nature of True Religion.

Particular to the Ancients and Moderns debate was the question of how to understand the greatness of the ancients, and justify the modern appeal to them, given their pagan minds. There are claims and counter-

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[32] Perhaps the most influential piece, certainly the best known, from the time is John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Religious Toleration* (1689). This is responsive to his contemporary political climate and in turn precipitates broader discussion in eighteenth century England.

claims surrounding whether or not ancient paganism makes classical thought necessarily deficient (without ever dismissing it completely) compared to that of modern Christian thinkers. For instance, Thomas Burnet's case for the moderns advantage in his cosmogony *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684) relies on the earth's history being inherently progressive as Biblically foretold. Relatedly, and despite ongoing risk, modern men of letters began to fervently resist the interference of the Church in matters literary and scientific. For instance, Jeremy Collier's pamphlet *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) was a precipitating factor in closing the not long reopened Restoration theatre for its alleged 'profaneness.' However, Collier received extensive serious and satirical criticism that denounced his claims of Church regulation of the theatre, and likewise, literature and poetry. Significantly, satire (pamphlets, plays, caricatures, etc) and satirical groups like the Scriblerians (see, (Rumbold, 2008)) presented a new powerful political opposition to the established institutions of Church and Crown.

Thirdly, the intellectual elitism of the Ancients and Moderns corresponds with the political–societal elitism of the ruling class. Although advocating the growth of the parliamentary statesmen's power in State affairs, it was generally upheld that the still fragile civic order was best improved through re-enforcing the existing social hierarchy. While within the scope of these ruling class Augustans, the advent of the two political parties meant that there are nevertheless identifiable opposing political ideologies. Despite their shared Christian morality, there was vehement argument over whether Whig or Tory possessed the genuine moral character to rule, that is, whose ideological understanding represented and embodied true natural (God-given) order. This was connected to the new political division between Whig and Tory with their respective ideologies mapping onto the religious division, that is, debated in terms of True Religion. Of course, each of the competing political Whig or Tory elites thought of themselves as the self-evident natural rulers, accusing their opponents of defectiveness. The same argument plays out amongst the

Ancients and Moderns with respect to the nature of poetic and intellectual genius, where it is debated which moral character, that is, old or new, is superior. The intellectual elitism of the Ancients and Moderns is directly connected with contemporary politics because near all of them identified as either Whig or Tory; and thus, the intellectual divisions often ran down political lines. These associated political allegiances and aims of the men of letters go some way to explain why, while sharing very similar accounts of poetry and knowledge, they fought over whose nature was the truly the best and wisest.

Underscoring these three concerns — political, religious, hierarchical — the central political and hence intellectual question of the period is: what constitutes the best and wisest character, our true human nature? Furthermore, how do we genuinely attain it? The Ancients and Moderns, then, can be rightly understood to be arguing over who (classical or contemporary) has the best and wisest character and why this is so. In turn, these best and wisest characters are rightly imitated in the education of the Augustan statesman. In general, it is accepted that human nature is constant throughout time, that is, all humans, ancient and modern, have the same faculties and capacity to develop them. However, according to the Moderns, it is an inherent advantage of their (seventeenth–eighteenth century) present to have the accumulated knowledge of the past, invoking the period's popular metaphor that a dwarf is always taller than the shoulders of the giants he (it is always he) stands on (Levine, 1991, p. 18). In contrast, Ancients such as Temple appeal to differences in circumstance between times, which is not an outright denial of the possibility of surpassing the ancients, only that presently moderns fail to do so (Levine, 1991, p. 19). As such it turns out that the common point of contention in the Ancients and Moderns debate is actually what, if anything, makes it possible to surpass the best and wisest ancients? In turn, these best and wisest ancient figures were generally held by all moderns to exemplify the height of political life, and their literary and philosophical works express and rightly virtuously move the character toward greatness. Longinus was

one of the eighteenth century's most popular examples of such great ancient character.[33]

§2   The Longinus of the Longinian Tradition

Despite twentieth and twenty-first century contention over the authorship of the ancient text *Peri Hypsous,*[34] there was no doubt in seventeenth and eighteenth century minds that it is by the historical (Dionysius) Cassius Longinus. Despite the lack of extant works, this third century Longinus was renowned as a great philosopher and critical writer, and advisor to Queen Zenobia of Palmyra. In the context of the political concerns of early eighteenth century England, the life of the historical Longinus exemplifies the best and wisest character, both philosophical and political. This is most clearly seen in William Smith's disquisition of 'The Life and Writings of Longinus' which forms the introduction to his popular English translation *Dionysius Longinus On the Sublime: Translated from the Greek, with Notes and Observations, and Some Account of the Life, Writing, and Character of the Author* (first published in 1739, it ran to a fifth edition published in 1800). Smith describes Longinus as follows:

> Fine genius, and a true philosophic turn, qualified not only for study and retirement; but will enable their Owners to shine, I will

[33] Thus, these ancient characters, including Longinus, ended up being appealed to by both sides of the debate. While the greatness of certain historical figures goes largely unquestioned, Ancients and Moderns still differ in their appeal to them in order to support their particular point of view. For example, although Homer is generally assumed to be a genius, there is much contention over whether or not he can then be critically discussed: in particular, can he be deemed faultless or not? See (Levine, 1991, pp. 148-180, throughout).

[34] In introducing his English translation *Longinus On the Sublime* (1899), W. Rhys Roberts raises the difficulty in reconciling its ancient author with an identifiable historical figure, especially the credited Cassius Longinus, because the text seemed more likely to have been produced in the first rather than the third century (Roberts, 1899, pp. 1-22). Early to mid-twentieth century discussion mostly repeated this; see, for example, (Nitchie, 1935, pp. 585-586; Russell, 1964, pp. xxii-xxix). However, for the most recent overview of Longinus, which reinstates Cassius, see: (Heath, 2012).

not say in more honourable but in more conspicuous Views, and to appear on the public stage of life with Dignity and Honour. And it was the Fortune of Longinus to be drawn from the contemplative shades of Athens, to mix in more active Scenes, and train young Princes to Virtue and Glory, to guide busy and ambitious Passions of the Great to noble Ends, to struggle for, and at Last to die in the cause of Liberty (Smith, 1739, p. ix).[35]

Significantly, Longinus's real life 'fine genius' gives him the exemplary character required to rightly produce the text of *Peri Hypsous*, that is, give it authority and instantiate the *true sublime* in it.[36]

It is an accepted view across the Longinian Tradition, indeed all eighteenth century men of letters, that the greatness of Longinus's thought in his text is necessarily the product of the greatness of his character, his natural *sublime genius*. This is captured by Alexander Pope in *An Essay on Criticism* (1711).[37] Pope writes:

> Thee, bold Longinus! all the Nine inspire,
> And bless their critic with a poet's fire.
> An ardent judge, who zealous in his trust,
> With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just;
> Whose own example strengthens all his laws;
> And is himself that great sublime he draws.
> (Pope, 1993)

From Pope's description what gives Longinus's account of the sublime its authority, and (as will be seen) establishes its truth, is his exemplary great (real life) character, that is, 'himself the great sublime he draws.' As will be further explained and discussed in this and subsequent chapters,

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[35] Smith praises Longinus for having a noble political life that eventually leads to an honourable death, where for maintaining his political principles and loyalties he was executed by Roman Emperor Aurelian out of 'vengeance' (Smith, 1739, p. xvii).

[36] This sort of appeal to Longinus as an exemplary character (explicitly and implicitly), which gives intellectual weight to his text, pervades the century. According to Monk, though Longinus hits the height of fashion in 1738, his popularity is slow to wane with *Peri Hypsous* remaining a staple of the well-bred and well-read throughout the eighteenth century, partly evidenced by the fifth and final edition of Smith's ubiquitous translation being printed in 1800 (Monk, 1935, p. 24).

[37] The eighteenth century agreement with and representative nature of Pope's description is evidenced by Smith making and retaining it as the epigraph to all editions of *Dionysus Longinus On the Sublime*.

common with the Longinian Tradition, Pope attributes Longinus with being the 'critic,' which is understood as the same given human capacity as the genius poet (this is, the 'poet's fire') to produce and judge the *true sublime*. Longinus is said to demonstrate this capacity of the genius in his fine expression of his descriptions and critical judgements in *Peri Hypsous* ('With warmth gives sentence, yet is always just').

In line with Pope's description, the Longinian Tradition's discussion of the *philosophical sublime* regularly focusses on the nature of the *sublime genius,* which is generally understood as a certain natural (God-given) human capacity to produce and judge the *philosophical sublime* in poetry. Significantly, since judging and producing the *philosophical sublime* is a singular capacity of the *sublime genius,* on such accounts, there is no distinction between creator artist and judging critic (and no real distinction between discussions of artistic creation and judging). Also sensitive to the political question of character development, it becomes a question of to what extent can the capacity for the *philosophical sublime* be cultivated by art (understood as a practice or technique)? Importantly, this early eighteenth century view is directly derived from Longinus's *On the Sublime*. For this reason, I now take a detour to look at Longinus's account of the *sublime genius*. Because, ultimately, I am interested in the Longinian Tradition's understanding and employment of Longinus (rather than the interpretation of him, per se) I refer to and discuss Smith's 1739 English translation, taking it as representative of the period, both in language and sentiment.

The Sublime Genius in Longinus: Art versus Nature

In Longinus's *On the Sublime,* the *sublime genius* has the capacity to irresistibly transport the audience, that is, produce his renowned *sublime effect*. Although he is rightly criticised for not fully describing its cause, Longinus does minimally define the *philosophical sublime* as 'a certain eminence or perfection of language' (Smith, 1739, p. 3). Longinus claims

that unlike mere persuasion, the *sublime effect* is naturally irresistible, it is 'endued with strength, irresistible, strikes home, and triumphs over every hearer' (Smith, 1739, pp. 3-4). Having posited its general irresistibility, Longinus holds that in virtue of our given human nature everyone has the capacity to feel — that is, be moved — by the *philosophical sublime*. In contrast, it takes the rare genius to create it (and, it seems, judge it); that is, only the *sublime genius* is able to produce the eminent or perfect language of the *philosophical sublime*. He writes:

> … the Sublime, when seasonably addressed, with the rapid force of lightning has borne down all before it, and shewn at one stroke the compacted might of genius (Smith, 1739, p. 4).

Thus, Longinus's primary concern becomes the nature of the *sublime genius* to create the genuine *philosophical sublime*. He focuses on the question of whether or not the *sublime genius* has simply a particular given nature, a rare natural talent or capacity, or, whether it might be developed and attained through art.

Longinus ultimately aims to defend the role of art, specifically, as the rhetorical rules of style in the development of the genius's natural creative capacity. He does this by arguing against, what I call, the denial of art. He initially identifies and describes this opponent's argument as follows:

> The Sublime (say they) is born within us, and is not to be learned by precept. The only art to reach it, is, to have the power from nature. And (as they reason) those effects, which should be purely natural, are dispirited and weakened by the dry impoverishing rules of art (Smith, 1739, p. 6).

According to Longinus, then, the proponent of the denial of art argues that the particular capacity to create the *philosophical sublime* is simply given nature, a rare natural talent. At its strongest, this view claims that the *sublime genius's* capacity is purely given nature, making any appeal to art redundant; that is, a genius has no need for the 'rules of art,' conversely, anyone without this given nature cannot benefit from these rules. Notably, here, Longinus gives no specific notion of nature or the natural. Yet, he

does introduce two senses of art. The first is art as 'power from nature,' which appears synonymous with the genius's given nature (capacity) to produce the *philosophical sublime*; while the second is 'rules of art,' which are supposedly the rhetorical rules of the *sublime style*. As presented by Longinus, his opponent denies the second sense. In turn, Longinus's response aims to address and defend it.

Like his opponent, Longinus accepts that the *sublime genius* has a certain given human nature, a rare innate spark. But he holds that the genius requires art to master that natural capacity. At length he argues:

> But I maintain, that the contrary [to the claim that the sublime is only given nature] might easily appear, would they [his opponent] only reflect that—tho' nature for the most part challenges a sovereign and uncontroulable power in the *Pathetic* and *Sublime*, yet she is not altogether lawless, but delights in a proper regulation. That again—tho' she is the foundation, and even the source of all degrees of the *Sublime*, yet that method is able to point out in the clearest manner the peculiar tendencies of each, and to mark the proper seasons, in which they ought to be enforced and applied. And further—that Flights of grandeur are then in the utmost danger, when left at random to themselves, having no ballast properly to poise, no helm to guide their course, but cumbered with their own weight, and bold without discretion. Genius may sometimes want the spur, but it stands as frequently in need of the curb (Smith, 1752, p. 6) (original emphasis).

Surprisingly, Longinus's counter-claim does not obviously address the second sense of art as rules. Instead, he demonstrates how the genius's nature benefits from regulation. Although the genius's capacity is given by nature, Longinus takes it to be self-evident that it needs developing — a 'helm to guide their course' along with both the 'spur' and the 'curb' — in order to be properly mastered. As he suggests, the right sort of development is correspondingly pleasurable, our nature 'delights in proper regulation.' Thus, he introduces a third sense of art as regulating human nature.

In the quoted passage, Longinus relates three aspects of art as regulating human nature. Firstly, this art conforms to the laws of true nature. He recognises that our natural affective response appears largely

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'uncontroulable' (i.e., uncontrollable) apparently pointing to our lack of control of or command over the passions; that is, it 'challenges a sovereign.'[38] But, he counters, our nature is 'not altogether lawless,' implying that our passions abide by laws of nature. As such, it appears on Longinus's account that it is by natural law that the *true sublime* is irresistible. It follows that the given nature of the *sublime genius* must conform to such laws, in order to produce it. Secondly, then, art properly identifies the true nature of the genius and the correct method or practice of it. Specifically, that the 'method is able to point out in the clearest manner the peculiar tendencies of each, … in which they ought to be enforced and applied.' On these two aspects of art alone, Longinus's understanding coincides with his opponent's initial sense of art as 'power of nature,' that is, it simply describes and abides by the laws of given human nature. Thus, it requires his third developmental aspect where art is 'to guide' the genius away from potential idiosyncratic deviation, the 'Flights of grandeur,' and toward the proper natural laws, that is, genuine given nature. Overall, according to Longinus, art as regulation is a (or any) method (the ancient sense of art, and associated technique, *techne*) that regulates the *sublime genius* to best conform with true (given) human nature.

Nevertheless, it is still not obvious how establishing art as regulation addresses Longinus's initial aim of defending the second sense of art as rules, that is, the rhetorical rules of *sublime style*. The connection (if any) between the two is never fully spelt out by Longinus. For the most part he appears to be just conflating the two, implying that the right rhetorical rules of *sublime style* just are the natural laws of the *philosophical sublime*. He seems to suggest that this makes these natural rules different

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[38] On Smith's translation, the relevant line that I am interpreting here appears misleading. It is perhaps better read as: 'tho' nature for the most part challenges a sovereign[,] and [is an] uncontroulable power in the Pathetic and Sublime, yet she [nature] is not altogether lawless, but delights in a proper regulation.' This is consistent with subsequent translations. For example, W. Rhys Roberts makes it: 'But I maintain that this will be found to be otherwise if it be observed that, while nature as a rule is free and independent in matters of passion and elevation, yet is she wont not to act at random and utterly without system' (Roberts, 1899, p. 45).

from those, presumably non-natural, ones his opponent is denying (Smith, 1752, p.5). Yet as written, this again just amounts to the first sense of art as 'power of nature' that is granted by his opponent; and thus, Longinus needs to show how the rules are of value and rightly employed, that is, explain what constitutes the mode of regulation. An alternative is that Longinus is accusing his opponent of an illicit generalisation from a view of rules that are non-natural to the denial of art as rules entire. This recasts Longinus's actual, perhaps ulterior, aim is to demonstrate that there is, at least one, sense of art that holds with respect to the *sublime genius*. This seems to be the case when he writes:

> … there is a *force* in eloquence, which depends not upon, nor can be learn'd by rule, yet even this could not be known without that light which we receive from art (Smith, 1739, p. 8).

The problem with this reading of Longinus is that it still does not give any reason for knowing or following his extensive set of rhetorical rules he describes in *On the Sublime*.

However, Longinus is most consistently read to hold that art as rules is encompassed by or falls under a general method of art as regulation. In setting out the features of the *false sublime*, Longinus mentions these two methods. Describing how to avoid stylistic vices, he writes:

> This [avoidance of vice] indeed may be easily learned, if we can gain a thorough insight and penetration into the nature of the true Sublime, which, to speak truly, is by no means an easy, or a ready acquisition. To pass a right judgement upon compositions is generally the effect of a long experience, and the last improvement of study and observation. But however, to speak in the way of encouragement, a more expeditious method to form our taste, may perhaps by the assistance of Rules be successfully attempted (Smith, 1739, pp. 20-21).

Longinus refers here to a general method of 'long experience' and 'study and observation,' which appears rightly understood as his sense of art as the regulation of nature; while the other method is clearly art as rules understood as the rhetorical rules of *sublime style*. Still, this does not offer an explanation of how to develop such knowledge (judgement) nor present

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the relationship between regulation and rules. Instead, Longinus's appeal to 'right judgement' further complicate matters.

At first glance Longinus's claim that the judgement of the *philosophical sublime* is a capacity reserved for the *sublime genius* appears to directly contradict his initial positing of the natural irresistibility of the *sublime effect*. In virtue of every human nature being naturally moved by it, presumably, we are all proper judges of the *philosophical sublime*; that is, we just know it when we feel it. But here he implies that it takes expertise to identify the difference between the effects of rhetorical persuasion of the *sublime style*, and being properly moved by the *philosophical sublime*. This suggests that the *sublime effect* alone is not sufficient to genuinely know, hence judge, the *philosophical sublime*. In actuality this does not undermine the general nature of the *sublime effect* because regardless of whether or not someone knows the actual cause of this affective movement, someone is still irresistibly moved by it. Thus, everyone is equally moved by the *true sublime*, the difference is whether we correctly know it or not. The idea is that it is only possible for the *sublime genius* to genuinely know — that is, judge — it to be an instance of the *true sublime* (or not), with the proper *sublime cause*. Nevertheless, it remains unclear how and who might usefully employ Longinus's methods to develop the proper judgement of *true sublime*.

In particular, Longinus still fails to establish the actual efficacy of art as rules because by his own lights simply knowing these rhetorical rules of *sublime style* is not sufficient for developing the proper judgement of the genuine *philosophical sublime*. Although Longinus hints that his general method involves some kind of cultivation of human nature, unfortunately, he leaves the development of *true sublime* judgement unresolved in order to concentrate on his exposition of the rhetorical rules of the *sublime style*. In turn, on my reading Longinus fails to fully reconcile his understanding of art as regulation of nature with his extensive

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discussion of rhetorical rules, which makes up most of *On the Sublime*.[39] However, I suggest that Longinus is sufficiently under-described that interpreting what constitutes his suggestive 'long experience' and 'study and observation' is ripely open to interpretive speculation. Indeed, this lack of detail on these issues is exploited by the Longinian Tradition, allowing its members to remain faithful to and identifiably following Longinus, whilst at the same time reading into his account their own early eighteenth century notions of nature, art, and attributing a timely philosophical and political role to the *sublime genius*. In turn, the Longinian Tradition discusses the political question of what constitutes the best and wisest character in terms of the *sublime genius*.

Completing Longinus's Project

As I set out in Chapter 1 (especially §6), Longinus's *On the Sublime* is understood and appealed to by the Longinian Tradition in three important ways. Firstly and foremost, following Boileau's commentary, the Longinian Tradition identifies Longinus to be making the distinction between the *sublime style*, that is, the classical doctrine (rules) of rhetorical persuasion, and the *philosophical sublime* that describes a particular striking affect.[40] Secondly and subsequently, the Longinian Tradition attribute Longinus's importance to his description of the *philosophical sublime*, specifically, as the powerful, irresistible transport or elevation of the audience. Significantly, to enhance the contrast with this *true sublime* the Longinian Tradition further associates the *sublime style* with pomposity and overwrought

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[39] Counter to my reading, some current commentators consider Longinus to be offering a synthesis of the *philosophical sublime* and the rhetorical *sublime style*. For instance, Suzanne Guerlac argues it is a 'trivialisation of Longinus' to distinguish a 'rhetorical sublime' and a 'natural sublime' in that 'one of the most crucial features of the Longinian sublime...is the neutralization of the opposition between nature and art and the enactment (or elaboration) of their reciprocity' (Guerlac, 1985, p. 277). Similarly, in Lawrence Kerslake's discussion of the relationship between art and nature in Longinus advances a sort of synthesis (2000, pp. 31-35). Nevertheless, I suggest that these accounts also take the interpretive licence that the eighteenth century accounts do to make this claim.

[40] See: (Doran, 2015; Kerslake, 2000, p. 42; Monk, 1935, p. 31)

language, that is, the *false sublime*. However, the widely held early eighteenth century criticism of Longinus is that, while he admirably describes the *sublime effect*, he fails to describe its cause. Thus thirdly, in response to their criticism, the central aim of the Longinian Tradition becomes to establish the proper cause of the *philosophical sublime*, and in this way complete Longinus's project. As detailed previously, this approach begins with Dennis and is then repeated by Richard Blackmore, Tamworth Reresby, and Jonathan Richardson, amongst others.

Now I turn to John Dennis, to demonstrate how his particular completion of Longinus's project plays out. In particular, it will be seen, that the *philosophical sublime* is understood in terms of the harmonious soul of the *sublime genius*.

§3   John Dennis's Account of the Philosophical Sublime

Dennis mentions the sublime throughout his critical works but his main discussion appears in *The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry* (1701) (CW1: 197–278) and *The Grounds of Criticism* (1704) (CW1: 325–374). The principal aim of these works is to offer an account of genuine and great poetry. His underlying motivation is the central political and intellectual question of that period, that is: what constitutes the best and wisest character? On his Longinian terms, it is recast as: what is the *sublime genius*? And how do we truly to attain it? Dennis addresses his question to the related debates of the day. *The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry* primarily engages with the now familiar Ancients and Moderns debate. As is consistent with the Longinian Tradition, Dennis agrees with the excellence of the ancients and the degeneracy of the moderns, but he argues that the ancients' advantage is not insurmountable. Taking up the Ancients' approach of discerning what is the definitive difference in the circumstances between the ancients and the moderns (see §1 above),

Dennis argues that the ancients' only advantage is the greatness of their subjects, those being, the sacred and divine (CW1: 214). Therefore, on his view modern poetry may be reformed and advanced by the proper poetic subject, which for Dennis is 'True Religion,' understood as the biblical God of revelation (CW1: 251–66).

In *The Grounds of Criticism* Dennis defends the value of poetry in Christian religious teaching and argues against any Church role in regulating the theatre. Here he is reprising and generalising the claims he makes in *The Usefulness of the Stage*[41] (1698) (CW1:148–93) which is his direct response to Jeremy Collier's pamphlet *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698) (see, §1 above). Against Collier, Dennis argues that the stage (specifically, the genre of tragedy) is consistent with Christian teaching. Moreover, he claims that tragic poetry properly 'moderates our Passions, and instructs us in our [Christian] Duty'; making it the only way to 'prepare [non-Christians] for the sublimer Doctrines of the Church' (CW1: 185). Recapitulating and expanding upon his claim from *The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry* that genuine and great poetry has True Religion as its subject, *The Grounds of Criticism* advances 'That Poetry is necessary for the inforcing [sic] Religion upon the Minds of Men' (CW1: 326). His claims against the regulation of the stage hint at the central features of his account of poetry; that is, genuinely great poetry has True Religion as its subject, and it appropriately excites the passions, and properly instructs the soul. It is in this context that Dennis's concept of the *philosophical sublime* is to be found.

The Role of Poetry to Instruct the Virtuous Character

Initially, Dennis defines poetry as 'an Imitation of Nature, by a pathetick and numerous Speech' (CW1: 215). By 'pathetick' he means passion or the passionate, with its origin in the greek *pathos*; it is passionate language that

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[41] The full title is: *The Usefulness of the Stage, to the Happiness of Mankind, To Government, and to Religion. Occasioned by a Late Book, Written by Jeremy Collier, M.A.*

moves an audience.[42] During the classical to romantic periods in poetry, 'numerous' means 'measured, rhythmic, harmonious,'[43] and this is related to 'numbers,' which refers to 'metrical verse' (Greene, 2012, p. 958).[44] In the context of Dennis's account of True Religion as set out in *The Advancement and Reformation of Poetry* and appealed to in *The Grounds of Criticism*, he understands genuine human nature to be 'Rule and Order, and Harmony' as universally prescribed by eternal divine law (CW1: 202). He locates both perfect virtue and beauty in this regularity of nature (CW1: 202, 335). He believes that what pleases is the virtuous because the design of True Religion is happiness, and the most pleasing beauty or happiest nature is the highest virtuous power, that is, the divine creator, God (CW1: 252–3). Dennis argues that poetry has the same design as True Religion (CW1: 251). Thus, the most pleasing poetry imitates the most virtuous character, which is consistent with the general assumption that goodness of, creator's character is required for the goodness of the creation.

Like True Religion, Dennis argues, poetry attains the height of virtuous pleasure by (at least momentarily) restoring the harmony of 'the Reason, the Passions, the Senses' (CW1: 246, 263). Dennis considers that this perfect harmony of the faculties is analogous to the prelapsarian state — what he usually refers to as the 'Primitive State' — in which humans were 'created Holy, Innocent, Perfect'(CW1: 255). According to Dennis, the Primitive State is where the faculties, that is, reason, the passions and the senses, are in perfect harmony. For him this is our genuine human nature and the one that poetry must imitate. The parallel that Dennis draws between poetry and True Religion is explicit:

> … as that alone is the True Religion, which makes the best
> Provision for the Happiness of those who profess it; so [like True

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[42] See *pathetic, n.* Entry 1, and pathos, n. Entry 1 and 4, in the *Oxford English Dictionary.*

[43] See *numerous, adj. and pron.* Entry II. 5. *Oxford English Dictionary.*

[44] Further 'metre was conceptualised as number of syllables in each line…More importantly…number indicated poetry's participation in the divine order' (Greene, 2012, p. 958).

Religion] that must be the best and the noblest Art, which brings the greatest Felicity with it. But as the Misery of Man proceeds from the Discord, [...] it follows, that nothing can make him Happy, but what can remove that Discord, and restore the Harmony of the Human Faculties. So that that must be the best and the noblest Art, which makes the best Provision at the same Time for the Satisfaction of all the Faculties, the Reason, the Passions, the Senses. But none of them provides in such a sovereign Manner as Poetry, for the Satisfaction of the whole Man together (CW1: 263).

Significantly, Dennis holds that poetry is the greatest human art.

Like the Longinian Tradition in general, Dennis understands art in terms of a method or practice for the development or instruction of virtuous character, that is, our true human nature. He specifically holds that art is the method for best fulfilling poetry's design to simultaneously satisfy the three faculties of reason, passion, and sense. As such, poetry, as the greatest human art, requires an 'end' (that is, purpose), and a 'means' (sometimes described as rules or principles) for acquiring that end (CW1: 215, 335). Following his analogy with True Religion, Dennis takes the two complementary ends of poetry to be 'subordinately' pleasure and 'finally' instruction of the virtuous character, the proper education of the soul (CW1: 335). According to him, these two ends are inextricably linked, as seen in the quote above where he posits 'that nothing can make [humans] Happy, but what can remove that Discord, and restore the Harmony of the Human Faculties.' In turn, Dennis describes instruction as this movement toward harmony, that is, when he writes: 'to instruct ..., that is, to bring Mankind from Irregularity, Extravagance, and Confusion, to Rule and Order' (CW1: 335). Furthermore, Dennis insists that poetry must be instructive in this way; otherwise it would not be an 'art' (CW1: 336).

Although Dennis assumes that it is obvious, he only implies that there is a connection between poetry's definition as the imitation of nature and its purpose to reform manners and develop the virtuous character. I take his line of thinking to be as follows: the highest virtuous character is one that attains Dennis's described state of harmony, that being the height

of our true human nature, and it is this natural character that poetry must imitate. However, as fallen beings our faculties are in varying states of imbalance, or as Dennis terms it, irregularity; *all* humans require instruction in order to experience our true nature, and attain a genuine virtuous character. Thus, poetry not only imitates (the virtuously pleasurable) human nature, but makes it possible for the imbalanced, irregular nature to be *moved* towards this imitated state. Conversely, poetic imitation of irregular or debauched human states is not genuine poetry and can only give false pleasure to the weak minded or those lacking taste (CW1: 328). In this respect Dennis's understanding of the instructive value of poetry draws on the accepted association of greatness of thought with the truly *philosophical sublime*. It also distinguishes between the genuine *true sublime* and the false appearance of the *sublime style*.

Dennis considers that the effective instruction of the human character is achieved by the appropriate excitement of the passions. He holds that the passions are the most influential force over human nature. Again this is derived from his account of True Religion where he believes that the Fall resulted from our greatness of passion, specifically, that we 'diverted Affection' from God to inferior objects of passion (CW1: 257).[45] In general, he argues, all human thought is attended by some passion, and we will be moved by that passion. So, he claims 'that all Instruction whatever depends upon Passion' (CW1: 337). For Dennis, it follows that

> Poetry, at the same time that it instructs us powerfully, must reform us easily; because it makes the very Violence of Passions contribute to our Reformation (CW1: 337).

In contrast to poetry, Dennis posits that philosophy fails to properly instruct because it merely appeals to reason. He argues that no knowledge of reasons can over-power our existing passions; once more this relies on

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[45] Problematically, here Dennis introduces a tension between his starting claim that the Primitive State is perfect psychological harmony and yet the passions have the diverting strength to overcome it. Jeffrey Barnouw observes 'Dennis goes so far as to claim "that Man, in his Primitive State, was always in lofty ravishing Transports." This makes rather awkward his attempt to render the Fall plausible' (Barnouw, 1983, p. 41). See also: (Morillo, 2000, pp. 30-31).

his claim that the Fall is the result of the greatness of passion. To be clear, his claim is about philosophy's instructive efficacy, not a denial of philosophical reasoning, which presumably informs the faculty of reason on his view.

It follows that Dennis correlates the instructive efficacy of poetry, particularly in relation to the different poetic styles, with the extent that it moves the passions. On his account, taking the 'end' of poetry to be instruction and the proper movement of passions to be the most effective method of instruction, then poetry's 'means' is the proper movement of the passions. In relation to this he posits that the principle of genuine poetry is that 'poetry must everywhere excite the passions' (CW1: 216, 337, 338). And conversely he states this as the rule: 'That where there is nothing which directly attends the moving of it [that is, Passion], there can be no Poetry' (CW1: 338). He further holds that instructive efficacy is amplified by greater movement. He states: 'The more Poetry moves, the more it pleases and instructs' (CW1: 338). He goes on to assert: 'Now if the chief Thing in Poetry be Passion, why then the chief thing in great Poetry, must be great Passion' (CW1: 215), concluding that the most passionate poetry is the most instructive. Overall then it is clear that Dennis holds that *all* genuine poetry must instruct the virtuous character by the proper excitement of the passions, and that the greatest poetry is the most passionate, and hence, the most instructive. On Dennis's account the greatest poetry is the *philosophical sublime*.

The Philosophical Sublime in Great Poetry

Dennis critically adopts and expands Longinus's account of the *philosophical sublime*. Following Longinus, who eminently describes the *sublime effect* as the irresistible transport of the hearer of great poetry and oratory, Dennis offers his own provocative description. He writes that it:

> Ravishes and Transports us, and produces in us a certain Admiration mingled with astonishment and with surprise […it is

an] invincible force which commits a pleasing Rape upon the very Soul of the Reader; that whenever it breaks out where it ought to do, like an Artillery of Jove, it Thunders blazes and strikes at once (CW1: 359).

As previously mentioned (Chapter 1, §6; this chapter, §3), Dennis criticises Longinus for only describing this *sublime effect* and failing to explain its cause (CW1: 223, 359). Dennis considers that his own understanding of poetry and True Religion is consistent with and completes Longinus's study of the *philosophical sublime* by determining its cause. As will be seen, Dennis argues that, ultimately, the *philosophical sublime* is the coming together of its cause and effect (CW1: 223). His simplest definition of the *philosophical sublime* is 'a great thought exprest with the Enthusiasm that belongs to it' (CW1: 222, 359). Significantly, for Dennis, the genuine *sublime effect* is the attendant enthusiastic passion.

Dennis is aiming to realign the term 'enthusiasm' with its positive association with genuine divine inspiration of sublime poets. His most focused discussion of enthusiasm occurs in *The Grounds* where he defines 'Greater Poetry' (CW1: 331, 338-40). This branch of poetry, he writes, 'is an Art by which a Poet justly and reasonably excites great Passion, in order to please and instruct, and make Mankind better and happier' (CW1: 338). He goes on to list the particular poetic genres of the greater: including epic, tragic and greater lyric.[46] The epic or heroic is the common exemplar of sublime poetic genre, and any relevant rules of style usually pertain to that genre. By definition, then, Dennis holds that 'Greater Poetry' must fulfil his principle by everywhere exciting *great* passion. In relation to this he makes the further claim that 'it is impossible for a Poet every where to excite in a very great degree, that which we vulgarly call Passion' (CW1: 338, see also 216). This leads him to distinguish 'two sorts of Passion,' that is, the vulgar or ordinary passions, and enthusiasm (CW1: 338).

For Dennis, the key difference between the vulgar passions and

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[46] The other branch is 'Lesser' poetry, 'which excites less Passion for the formention'd ends;' it includes comedy, satire, the little ode, elegy, and pastoral poems'. CW1: 331, 338.

enthusiasm is the object that moves the passion. Vulgar passions are moved by the direct, or related, ideas of objects of ordinary, everyday experience, which he describes as 'that common Society which we find in the World' (CW1: 338). For example, he writes that:

> Anger is moved by an Affront that is offer'd us in our presence, or by the Relation of one; Pity by the Sight of a mournful Object (CW1: 338).

In contrast, he describes enthusiasm as the strong passion moved by ideas of objects 'that belong not to common life' (CW1: 338), or, 'when their Cause is not clearly comprehended' (CW1: 216). Initially, the objects of enthusiasm appear to be simply God and other divine creatures, but he also suggests enthusiasm is excited by a certain experience of everyday objects (CW1: 339). To demonstrate this, he adapts the classical example of the sun. He describes the vulgar idea of the sun as 'of a round flat shining Body, of about two foot diameter'; while, he continues, that the enthusiastic idea of the sun is 'of a vast and glorious Body, and the top of all visible Creation, and the brightest material Image of all Divinity' (CW1: 339).[47]

According to Dennis, this enthusiastic idea of everyday objects is the result of a particular contemplative state of the mind that he usually refers to as 'meditation' (CW1: 338). Although he lacks clarity and consistency with his terminology, Dennis generally takes the 'soul' to encompass all our internal faculties of reason, passions, and sense (CW1: 253), whereas the 'mind' is our faculty of reason, where we have, reflect upon, and imagine thoughts and ideas (CW1: 217). The vulgar idea arises from direct experience or mere reflection on the everyday, which are either the immediate or recalled ideas in the mind; whereas, meditation is the imaginative reflection of the mind on the ideas that occur in it (CW1: 217). It is the contemplation of the ordinary and immediate idea of the

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[47] Recall that he believes that the Fall resulted from diverting our passion from the objects of God's divinity to profane, earthly objects (CW1: 257). As such, we may take the objects of Enthusiasm to correspond with the divine and the vulgar to correspond with the earthly.

object that creates the idea of God, that is, the natural divine immanent in the harmonious order of the universe. Consider again his example of the sun: in meditation, the idea of the ordinary image of the sun becomes the divine image of it. He considers that this image exhibits the liveliness and movement 'as if [the divine] were, before our very Eyes' (CW1: 218, see also 339). As such, the contemplative idea or image of the divine elicits enthusiastic passions.

Consistent with his understanding of enthusiasm, and the divine idea or image that elicits it, Dennis takes the *sublime cause* to be God's divine nature; specifically, the virtuous pleasure of the harmonious order of the universe. Although Dennis is focussing on the *philosophical sublime* as it is expressed in poetry, on his view the *sublime source* is any naturally harmonious object in the God-created universe. Presenting this in biblical terms he refers to heavenly as well as worldly objects. And he argues that because originally all creatures, even the dreadful and dangerous, were created perfectly harmonious by God, that we can be virtuously pleased by these objects that we would ordinarily dread or fear (CW1: 264). Under the right conditions of contemplation, then, any and every object in the universe is potentially the source of the *philosophical sublime*. It seems that the propensity to be moved by some objects over others depends on the extent of the imbalance or irregularity of the soul. It also follows that the most powerful objects, those that usually elicit fear or threat, generally move even the most irregular soul. However, it would be a mistake to reduce Dennis's understanding of the *sublime source* to only objects of this sort; rather, for him, it is whatever promotes the *sublime state*.

On Dennis's view, the *sublime state* is attained in perfect meditation where the faculties of the soul — that is, reason, the passions, and the senses — are in complete harmony. This is what he means when he writes: 'take the Cause and the Effects together, and you have the Sublime' (CW1: 223). Importantly for Dennis, this state is analogous to the Primitive State prior to the Fall. He states: 'So that Man, in his Primitive State, was always in lofty ravishing transports' (CW1: 256). Analogously, he says that

… in a *sublime* and accomplish'd poem, the Reason, and Passions and Senses are pleased at the same time superlatively' (my emphasis, CW1: 263).

In both cases, the passions are at their greatest level of excitement (CW1: 256, 263). He holds that the mind's workings are a wondrous mystery of God's creation and beyond human comprehension. And, indeed, this incomprehensibility contributes to the excitement of Enthusiasm. In meditation we appear to be aware of both the wonder of the object and the wonder of our mind's (God-given) capacity to generate it. He writes that the mind has a 'conscious View of its own Excellence' (CW1: 217, see also CW1: 217–8, 360).

Dennis considers that this 'View' of our own excellence elicits 'a certain noble Pride' (CW1: 360). This association of the *sublime effect* with pride is first seen in Longinus, who writes:

> For the mind is naturally elevated by the true Sublime, and so sensibly affected with its lively strokes, that it swells in transport and an inward pride, as if what was only heard had been the product of its own invention (Smith, 1739, p. 21).[48]

Here Longinus is describing the *sublime effect* on the mind of a true judge of the *philosophical sublime*. The true judge's feeling of pride results from the 'transport of his soul' rather than 'mere sounds of words' on his ears (Smith, 1739, p. 21); that is, the judge *re*-creates the poet's image *as if* it is his 'own invention.' In turn, he feels the pride at the capacity to produce such an image in his own mind. Dennis reproduces Longinus nearly word for word:

> That which is truly sublime has this particular to it, that it exalts the Soul, and makes it conceive a greater Idea of it self; filling it with Joy and with a certain noble Pride, as if it self had produc'd what it but barely reads (CW1: 360).

Simply put, Dennis is advancing that the soul is both joyed and filled with

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[48] In the context of Longinus's *On the Sublime*, here Longinus appears to be referring to the effect of the *sublime genius* on the mind of the audience. The audience feels pride at the images caused by the sublime genius's poetic expression, that is, 'what was only heard,' because these images appear in their mind *as if* they created them for or from themselves, that is, 'the product of its own invention.'

pride that our mind is capable of observing natural order and creating the image of God.

Dennis's discussion of the experience and effect of the *philosophical sublime* is largely described in terms of the *sublime genius,* who in perfecting the *sublime state* attains the highest virtuous character. On his account, by having the right sort of perfectly harmonious soul, the *sublime genius* can correctly judge the *true sublime* from the *false,* and also (re-)produce it in sublime poetry; that is, the sort of expression that genuinely imitates God's divine nature, which elicits the *sublime effect* in its audience. In this way, sublime poetry is meant to be the most instructive because it is not only powerfully moves the passions but also is the product and the example of the properly virtuous character. Dennis appears to distinguish the *sublime genius* as having a special rare capacity to attain this height of harmony of the faculties, where the genius's soul can directly 'feel' enthusiasm (CW1: 339) in order to spontaneously create, and be moved by, an image of God's divine nature. However, in doing so Dennis links the judging and production of the *philosophical sublime* in poetry in such a way that it now appears that only the genius can be properly moved by it, thus, denying sublime poetry's instructive value. This tension in Dennis's account will be fully discussed in Chapter 4.

For now, it is important to recognise that Dennis introduces three central aspects of the *philosophical sublime* that are variously adopted, adapted, and appealed to across the Longinian Tradition. Firstly, that the *philosophical sublime* is a certain harmonious state of the soul that is directly connected with our true God-given human nature, and when such harmony is perfectly attained it is the height of the virtuous character. Secondly, the *sublime cause* is in some way God's divine nature, and rightly attended by the enthusiastic passion associated with divinity. Thirdly, sublime poetry has instructive value and forms part of the development of the virtuous character; as such, it engages with and implements a sense of art as a developmental practice or technique, and in contrast to the *sublime style.* Therefore, I turn to discussing these three aspects of nature, God, and

art, and their connections, in the Longinian Tradition as represented by Dennis, particularly in relation to the *sublime genius*. And I highlight further connections within the context of the Ancients and Moderns debate and the associated political motivations.

(Please remember, overall I am focussing on the shift from Dennis to Shaftesbury, and this discussion of the Longinian Tradition is only to indicate the overarching terms of the general view that Dennis represents. Therefore, details of particular Longinians will not be discussed in the following.)

§4 Nature, God, and Art in the Longinian Tradition

Responsive to the Ancients and Moderns politically motivated question — what constitutes the best and wisest character, our true human nature? — the early eighteenth century discussion of the *philosophical sublime* is interested in human nature. Generally, the natural is understood as any thing that conforms to its true God-given nature. The Longinian Tradition follows the period's general notion of nature that is informed by the emerging empirical natural philosophy (science) that is grounded in the observation of natural order in the physical universe.[49] As Basil Willey puts it in *The Eighteenth-Century Background*: 'For what had science revealed? Everywhere design, order, and law where hitherto there had been chaos' (1940, p. 12). Willey rightly goes on to suggest that, at least initially, this appeal to observed order brings about the naturalisation of

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[49] This appeal to natural philosophy anticipates moral philosophy's psychological turn that David Hume later described as 'the science of human nature' (Hume, 1999, p. 88).

God (1940, pp. 13-15).[50] For medieval Christianity, direct knowledge of God primarily comes through revelation; that is, both biblical and the period's contemporary claims of enthusiastic inspiration. But the growing sixteenth–seventeenth century worry is that it seems that this way to know God only leads to conflicts over the veracity and right interpretation of the various revelatory claims. Relevantly, the seventeenth century's Civil War, Restitution, and Revolution in Britain are considered evidence of such conflict. In contrast, by observing the naturally ordered and law-abiding universe, in which God's divine nature is indisputably self-evident, a new way of directly knowing God appears possible.

On this naturalised understanding, God becomes simultaneously the naturally divine that is both immanent in the harmonious order of the universe and also the designing mind of this universal, law-abiding nature. Both claims are grounded in the observation of nature. The observed natural order is evidence of God's presence in all nature; that is, where there is order there is God, and vice versa. In this way, God is immanent in all parts of nature, and the natural is whatever conforms to the divine laws of nature. Conversely, the unnatural is whatever goes against its true divine nature. Again this sense of unnatural deviancy comes from observation; that is, humans and creatures are observed going against their natural design. However, considering that such an account posits God's divine order as immanent in the entire universe, it remains unclear how it can explain the apparent absence of God required for deviancy. Nevertheless, on this view, it is claimed to follow from observing perfect universal design that it must have a perfect infinite designing mind. As the designing mind, God is often described as the divine artist, which is applied not only to the anthropomorphic God of Biblical creation but also to other abstract theistic descriptions, like Shaftesbury's forming form (as will be discussed in Chapter 3).

Additionally on this view, human nature is understood in terms of

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[50] The 'initially' points to the eventual move away from God to the secular that emerges in the eighteenth century understanding of science and philosophy.

the observable God-designed order of the universe, where it is held that that in virtue of the human soul being designed by God it must conform to its true God-given ordered (harmonious) nature. But, God has designed humans to be rational, the mind's faculty of reason. This sets us apart from the brutes and beasts that are moved by the laws of nature just on instinct (the ordinary movement of passions); humans are made to be thinking beings that have the reasoning capacity to observe, identify, and understand this divine order in nature. Connectedly, human souls are designed with the capacity to be moved by this experience of God's divine order (that is, enthusiastic passion, rather than mere instinct to conform to natural law). The Longinian Tradition understands the *philosophical sublime* to be such an affective experience. Couched in these terms, then, the proper *sublime cause* — what we are being moved by — is the direct experience of God's divine nature. Consequently, the Longinian Tradition understands that it completes Longinus's project by identifying this proper cause of the *philosophical sublime*.

With God being immanent in all things, on this view, potentially all natural objects can be the source of the *sublime effect*. This seems to raise at least two worries. First, considering that the universe is entirely naturally ordered (God immanently everywhere) why, evidently, are we not constantly under the *sublime effect* of irresistible transport? And relatedly, why do some natural things appear to be the source of the *sublime effect* while others do not? The main answer for this is that the affective experience of the *philosophical sublime* — the *sublime state* — is not simply the observation of natural order, in the way that the natural philosopher observes and identifies the laws of nature. The *sublime state* also requires that the observing human soul is in some sort of harmony. Although not often fleshed out, two senses of harmony are described within the Longinian Tradition, both of which are compatible. One sense has just been seen in Dennis, who argues that the faculties of the human soul, that is, reason, the passions, and the senses, are in harmony. The other sense occurs between the human mind and God's mind, where the human mind

is in a state of harmony with God's mind, as will be seen adopted by Shaftesbury. Both of these senses of harmony support the accepted idea that the human soul needs to attain perfect order, its true nature, to properly experience the *philosophical sublime*.

The second and subsequent worry is specific to the Longinian Tradition's focus on poetry; that is, if the true *sublime cause* is God's divine nature, and it requires a harmonious state of the soul, how can it be produced in a human artifice like poetry? To explain this, these accounts consider that poetry is a source, that is, something conducive to experience the *philosophical sublime*, not a cause of it. (Similarly, as will be seen Shaftesbury identifies certain places in physical nature, especially woods and mountains, as the *sublime source*.) Further, the observed laws of nature that an object conforms to — in this case, poetry's rules of rhetoric (but also, for instance, nature's observable rules of motion) — describe the nature of God's design, yet the cause is God's immanent nature. Importantly, in poetry this is understood as the correct movement of the passions from disharmony to the proper harmony of our true nature. On this picture, merely abiding by laws, without the proper causal experience of God-designed harmony, is only the appearance of nature and not sufficient to express nor elicit the *philosophical sublime*. In poetry, this appearance of nature is understood as the result of following the *sublime style*. In turn, on these accounts the *sublime style* is associated with pompous and overwrought language that attempts to move the passions but fails to move them towards virtuous harmony.

Although it is thought that all naturally ordered objects cause the *philosophical sublime*, it does appear that these accounts hold that certain sources are more conducive to promoting the relevant *sublime state* in the human soul.[51] It remains unclear why this is the case; nevertheless, the general claim seems to be that it is evidenced by observable nature. For

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[51] The problems arise, as will be seen in Chapter 4, when these same accounts also start to make claims about who, which particular characters, can experience the *philosophical sublime*.

Dennis and the Longinian Tradition it is from our experience of poetry that the genre of epic poetry that is more conducive to promoting the *sublime state*.[52] In turn, this *sublime source* is the most instructive of the virtuous character. Following Dennis, the Longinian Tradition holds that sublime poetry expresses the height of our natural harmony, our true good, and as such, best instructs the undeveloped character to become the highest morally virtuous character. Significantly, again following Dennis, sublime poetry pleases and instructs by eliciting enthusiasm. However, during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, enthusiasm is largely a pejorative term, often associated with rabble-rousing zealotry, mass hysteria, and political radicalism.

During the early eighteenth century, and reflecting its ancient origins, enthusiasm basically means some kind of direct divine inspiration (Heyd, 1995, p. 2). However, Michael Heyd observes that during this period it is not being applied to a unified phenomenon (1995, p. 4), rather that it has religious, philosophical, scientific, and rhetorical versions, which are criticised not only on theological but also medical grounds (p. 6). Heyd points out that this medicalisation of enthusiasm makes it a manifestation of melancholy (p. 6); in relevant terms, it is a form of unnatural dis-order of the mind. Because certain religious enthusiasts (claiming to receive direct revelation from God) had popular mass followings that challenged aristocratic State rule, a simplified view of the conflict over enthusiasm might be drawn between charisma and establishment, or elite and popular culture. Yet Heyd offers a subtler reading. He writes that:

> The conflict between the enthusiasts and their opponents was, therefore, not necessarily a conflict between representatives of popular culture on one hand, and the elite on the other. Rather, it could reflect confrontation between two competing models of the relationship between the elite and the populace (Heyd, 1995, p.7)

Heyd's point is suggestive of the period's central political, intellectual, and

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[52] And as will be seen, Shaftesbury's discussion of physical nature holds that woods and mountains are the *sublime source*.

social question of who counts as the true and just authority.

In terms of the Longinian Tradition, the period's conflicting senses of enthusiasm map onto the *philosophical sublime* and the *sublime style*. On the accounts, like Dennis's, that are attempting to reclaim the term enthusiasm, the true or genuine sense is considered to be the attendant passion of the *sublime effect* of transport or elevation. The connection of the *philosophical sublime* with divine inspiration comes out of the naturalised understanding of God, because on this emerging understanding, God's divine nature appears indisputably self-evident from observing the naturally ordered and law-abiding universe. Thus, the *philosophical sublime* offers a new way of directly knowing God's divine nature. For the Longinian Tradition, experience of the *sublime state* where the mind creates an image of God which elicits enthusiastic passions, is understood as a natural (non-revelatory) divine inspiration. Although attempting to reclaim the term enthusiasm, the direct appeal to divine inspiration remains mostly implicit in Dennis's account, and the Longinian Tradition in general. (But as will be seen in Chapter 3, it is central to Shaftesbury's account of the *philosophical sublime*.) Also on these accounts, false enthusiasm is the passion elicited by the *sublime style*. This false feeling elicited by the *sublime style* is regularly ridiculed as high-flown pomposity. Significantly, though, it emerges that the genuine enthusiastic experience of God is reserved for the *sublime genius*, which reinforces the intellectual and political elitism that dictates who has social and educational authority.

In relation to the *sublime genius* and character development, the Longinian Tradition generally exhibits a general shift in emphasis away from classical criticism's stylistic rule-following towards the poetic art of imitation. Both of these critical approaches arise out of Aristotle's original, in which they have particular yet complimentary roles in rhetorical persuasion. However, the Longinian Tradition tends to treat the two separately. On one hand, the Longinian Tradition stylistic rule-following is the (bad) art of the rhetorically persuasive *sublime style*, while on the other, imitation is the (good) art of the *philosophical sublime*. Again reflecting the

question of moral education — that is, whom to imitate? — imitation is understood in two ways in relation to the *philosophical sublime*. The first is where the *sublime genius* has the capacity to represent and imitate true human nature in genuine sublime poetry. The second takes imitation to be the natural manner of human instruction, in order to develop the given capacity for the proper experience of the *philosophical sublime*. On this view, by experiencing the *true sublime* in poetry (that is, the imitation of true human nature) the under- or undeveloped mind is moved just like (that is, it imitates) the mind of the ordered mind that produced it.[53] In this way, sublime poetry is meant to instruct.

The Sublime Genius

If the proper sources of the *philosophical sublime* are causally related to God's divine nature, then as the creation of the finite human mind poetry still does not seem like it can count as such a source. It seems one step too far away. Yet what makes it possible on these accounts is that, similarly to the artist-God (as designer), the particularly human rational and affective capacity to experience the *philosophical sublime* extends to its creation. In some sense the human soul mirrors God's divine nature such that humans have the similar capacity for creation. This human creative capacity is central to the Longinian Tradition's discussion of the *sublime genius*. It has two aspects. The first aspect is the imaginative ability to create an idea or image of God's divine nature in the human mind. According to this view, the creation of such an image is necessary to experience the *sublime effect*, and it is also what is regularly described as *greatness of thought*. Importantly, this capacity is required for humans to correctly judge the *true sublime*. The second aspect of this human creative capacity is to (re-)produce the *sublime effect*, where in virtue of mirroring God's mind, the human mind can

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[53] Again this claim of the instructive value of sublime poetry is in tension with the Longinian Tradition's appeal to greatness of thought, which appears to deny the basic claim that it is possible for all humans to experience the *philosophical sublime*. For further discussion, see Chapter 4.

rightly imitate God's design; specifically express it in poetry.

Unlike God's design and designing mind, no human mind is able to design its own distinct nature, or its own natural order. On the prevailing early eighteenth century understanding of nature, this would be going against our God-given nature and simply the unnatural deviancy of a vicious character. Rather, the idea is that the human mind can genuinely imitate true natural order in the creation of human artifice. So God's divine nature is the *cause* of the image in the *sublime genius*'s mind. However, the genius's truly sublime expression (re-)creates that image of divine nature. The image created by the *sublime genius* in, for example, sublime poetry is a *source* that rightly creates the image of divine natural order in the mind of the audience. And it is this genius-created image that the true critic judges to be the *true sublime* in poetry. Importantly, it is the same God-given creative capacity that allows for the image to be produced and judged by the human mind; specifically, the *sublime genius*. To both produce and judge the *true sublime*, the *sublime genius* must attain the height of natural order. This perfectly ordered human nature — the harmonious soul — is, importantly, directly identified with the height of moral virtue. Thus, the *sublime genius* is necessarily the morally best and wisest character. In turn, the human artist is regularly understood to mirror the divine artist in creating what is true, good, and beautiful.

Within the scope of the discussion of the *sublime genius*, the Longinian Tradition's various claims about the creative capacity appear consistent. But it remains unclear how they are meant to work in or relate to the ordinary human mind's experience of the *philosophical sublime*. Particularly, the claim that the creation of an image of God is necessary to experience the *sublime effect*, and yet producing such an image of God is the result of the genius's greatness of thought. The problem is that in order to maintain the general irresistibility of the *sublime effect* all human minds must have the capacity to create the image of God. However, this is then denied by the Longinian description that it is *only* the genius who has the greatness of thought, the creative capacity, to do so. As already seen in the

discussion of Longinus (§2, above), it might be thought that everyone is affected, but only the genius can judge it to be the true *philosophical sublime*. This is consistent with their additional claim that the true critic (judge) requires the same creative capacity as the true poet (producer). Nevertheless, this tension remains because the appeal to greatness of thought still denies the basic claim that it is possible for all humans to irresistibly experience the *philosophical sublime*. By focussing almost entirely on the *sublime genius*, often this tension goes unnoticed, and on the occasions where there is an attempt address it, it remains largely unresolved. (This problem will be further discussed in Chapter 4.)

Despite these difficulties, the reason that the Longinian Tradition insists on its appeal to the 'greatness of thought' in order to explain the rare nature of the *sublime genius*. Evidently, from observation there are only a few genius human minds that naturally create, or truly express, in poetry the *philosophical sublime*. As such, this supports the idea that the *sublime genius* has some sort of special capacity, one that is distinct from the ordinary human capacity to be naturally and irresistibly transported by the *philosophical sublime*. Moreover, any special capacity must be God-given nature, especially for the genius to reach the height of moral virtue, otherwise it would be the unnatural deviancy of a vicious character. Nevertheless, describing this understanding of the *sublime genius* in terms of a God-given natural capacity, the Longinian Tradition might now appear to be committed to denying the role of art. Recall from the discussion of Longinus in §2 above, that the denial of art argues, at its strongest, that the *sublime genius*'s capacity is purely *given* nature, making any appeal to art redundant. In Willey's discussion of eighteenth century understanding of natural science, religion, laws, he observes that

> … the special problem in criticism was to reconcile adherence to Nature with adherence to the rule of Art, and both with the requirements of reason and good sense (1940, p. 25).

Nevertheless, in light of the instructive value the Longinian Tradition attributes to poetry, art is understood to be a developmental practice but

this practice is never fully explained or described.

Overall, for the Longinian Tradition, nature and the natural generally refers to true God-given human nature, which includes our natural capacity to experience the *philosophical sublime*. In turn, art refers to any method of developing such a natural capacity. Importantly, the human creative capacity to rightly experience, judge and produce the *philosophical sublime* is equated with the morally virtuous character. Thus, developing this capacity for the *philosophical sublime* forms the art of general human development, where truly sublime poetry rightly moves our enthusiastic passions to attain the natural harmony of the soul. In turn, poetry and literary perfection and defect is seen to directly reflect moral virtue and vice, respectively, of the character that produces it. As such, the *sublime genius* who creates truly sublime poetry must have a perfectly harmonious soul and attains the height of moral virtue. Nevertheless, what constitutes and who counts as the genuine *sublime genius* and offers proper instruction is heatedly and pervasively contended during the period. Indeed, the question of the proper judgement of the *true* and *false sublime* becomes the high point of contention within the Longinian Tradition and its critics.

The details of this contention will be discussed in Chapter 4. But for now, having established the main features of Dennis's account of the *philosophical sublime* as representative of the Longinian Tradition, I turn to Shaftesbury's account. Again I simply ask — what is Shaftesbury's *philosophical sublime*? In turn, I set out his actual relationship with the Longinian Tradition.

Chapter Three

Shaftesbury and the Philosophical Sublime

In this chapter I identify and discuss the *philosophical sublime* found in the works of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury. As I argued in Chapter 2, the Longinian Tradition introduces the *philosophical sublime,* and distinguishes it from the rhetorical rules of the *sublime style.* Exemplified by Dennis's account, the English Longinian Tradition's description of the *philosophical sublime* is a certain harmonious state of the soul, where the enthusiastic passions are rightly moved by God's divine nature. In particular, the *sublime genius* has the capacity to perfectly attain this *sublime state* and express it in poetry, making them the true judge and true producer of the *philosophical sublime.* In terms of the Ancients and Moderns' central concern about what constitutes proper moral education, sublime poetry is understood to correctly cultivate the virtuous character because it rightly moves the passions. It will be seen that Shaftesbury advances a similar understanding of the *philosophical sublime,* which shares the same central features with Dennis's account. However, Shaftesbury describes the *sublime state* in terms of a particular experience of physical nature rather than poetry, and the *sublime genius* is discussed in terms of the mind of the philosopher rather than the poet. Thus, I set out the actual nature of the shift of the *philosophical sublime* from poetry to physical nature in the early eighteenth century.

Along with the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury shares the central concern that emerges from the Ancients and Moderns debate and political climate in England surrounding moral education. As he concentrates on the state of modern philosophy, Shaftesbury recasts the question as: how do we become a philosopher, and live the best philosophical life? In the context of the Ancients and Moderns debate (set out in Chapter 2, §1), Shaftesbury basically defends the ancients on knowledge. He opposes both the dogmatic doctrine of contemporary scholasticism with its systematic university learning, and the sceptical empiricism advocated by his mentor John Locke. However, like Dennis, Shaftesbury does not believe that the ancients' knowledge is necessarily better than his fellow moderns; nor does he deny that much can be learnt from the new empiricism, especially applied to natural philosophy. Indeed, he advocates the importance of a liberal education, including the new science. Instead, Shaftesbury identifies the ancients' advantage to be their philosophical practice (that is, how we come to know) rather than the content of their knowledge (that is, what we know). His focus, then, is the ancient question of how to live, but in his contemporary modern terms of how to live as a philosopher in English civil, polite society.[54]

To form his answer to what constitutes the genuine philosophical life, Shaftesbury introduces the developmental practice of enthusiastic philosophy. As will be seen, his *philosophical sublime* plays an important role in this practice. Although elements appear across his collected works, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times,* his philosophical practice, and the role, of the *philosophical sublime* fully emerges in his dialogue *The Moralists, A Philosophical Rhapsody, Being a Recitation of Certain Conversations, On Natural and Moral Subjects*. To begin (§1) I set out Shaftesbury's usage of the term sublime to identify the actual shift of the *philosophical sublime* from the Longinian Tradition's account of poetry to Shaftesbury's experience of

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[54] Lawrence E. Klein describes the nature of Shaftesbury's civility in terms of 'politeness,' which is understood as 'refined sociability' that is associated with and defined by being 'gentlemanly' and informs social and cultural 'manners' (Klein, 1994, pp. 7-8).

physical nature. Then (§2), I turn to Shaftesbury's enthusiastic philosophy proper. He holds that philosophy's aim is knowledge through the cultivation of our true human nature and society. He argues that the universe is a harmonious, co-operative system designed by the perfectly ordered mind of God, and that the human mind has the capacity to observe God's natural order and create it. In (§3) I identify the true philosophical enthusiasm that Shaftesbury employs in his enthusiastic philosophy. Significantly (§4), I demonstrate that his *philosophical sublime* is a particular state of enthusiasm. Finally, I make clear the role of the *philosophical sublime* as a philosophical practice in Philocles' conversion from moderate sceptic to philosophical enthusiast.

§1   On Shaftesbury's Terms: the Shift of the Sublime from Poetry to Physical Nature

The initial difficulty with any attempt to determine the role of the sublime in Shaftesbury's philosophy is that throughout his collected works, *Characteristics*, he rarely uses the term. Where he does use it, he largely takes for granted that he is using it in the period's familiar and well-understood way that is introduced and popularised by the Longinian Tradition. Thus, he never feels the need to clearly define nor explain it. At first glance, he also appears to just associate the term 'sublime' with the rhetorical *sublime style*. For instance, in *The Moralists* he refers to 'the sublime [style] of the orators' (*Characteristics*: 320),[55] which basically repeats Boileau's comment 'by the [philosophical] Sublime he [Longinus] does not mean *what the Orators call the Sublime Style*' (my emphasis) when

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[55] All references will be from the Klein volume of *Characteristics* (Shaftesbury, 1999). All inline reference will be abbreviated as *Characteristics*: page number(s).

distinguishing it from the *philosophical sublime* (see Chapter 2, §2).[56] Consistent with the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury holds that this sense of the *sublime style* — taken to be synonymous with rhetorical persuasive high style — is a stylistic ill in its early eighteenth century application. He makes this clear when he completely dismisses 'the florid and over-sanguine humour of high style' (*Characteristics*: 111). In this way, he conforms with the Ancients and Moderns debate's general appeal to the ancients for the purpose of improving modern poetry. And his complaint here reprises the now familiar one seen throughout the Longinian Tradition.[57]

Shaftesbury's specific criticism of the *sublime style* is most clearly expressed in *Soliloquy, or Advice to the Author* (*Characteristics*: 70-162) (henceforth, *Soliloquy*). In it he details his developmental private practice of Socratic-style self-dialogue, that is, to soliloquise, in order to gain genuine self-knowledge and perform effective self-criticism.[58] As the practice is carried out through writing, he discusses various rhetorical styles and critical methods, public and private, including the *sublime style*. Consistent with the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury explicitly associates it with the pompous. He writes:

> … amid the several styles and manners of discourse or writing, the easiest attained and earliest practised was the miraculous, the pompous or what we generally call the sublime (*Characteristics*: 108).

Then he elaborates on the stylistic features that produce the *sublime style*:

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[56] Boileau quoted in Chapter 2, §2, from (Doran, 2015, p. 111) the full quote:

> It must be observed then that by the Sublime he [Longinus] does not mean what the Orators call the Sublime Style, but something extraordinary and marvellous that strikes us in a discourse and makes it elevate, ravish and transport us.

[57] Indeed, as set out in Chapter 2, it is inherited from Longinus. In fact, who, it makes you wonder, is actually holding the so called 'commonly held sublime' if everyone is arguing against it? In this way all participants are defending themselves against and accusing each other of such bad behaviour. It is what everyone is doing.

[58] For a discussion of this practice in Shaftesbury see (Sellars, 2016).

> In poetry and studied prose, the astonishing part, or what commonly passes for the sublime, is formed by the variety of figures, the multiplicity of metaphors, and by quitting as much as possible the natural and easy way of expression of the which most unlike to humanity or ordinary use (*Characteristics*: 109).

Appealing to Aristotle's account in the *Poetics* of the origins of Greek poetry, Shaftesbury likens this complicated, unnatural modern poetic manner with that of the earliest ancient 'spurious race' of poets, who were 'deposed' by Homer, who, in turn, 'gave rise to a legitimate and genuine kind' of poetry (*Characteristics*: 109).

In this discussion, Shaftesbury is applying the Longinian Tradition's distinction between the *sublime style* and the *philosophical sublime* in poetry. Specifically, he is blaming the spurious ancient poets' failure on their use of the 'pompous' *sublime style*. Analogously, Shaftesbury argues that (much of) modern poetry fails because it also employs it. In contrast, he attributes Homer's subsequent success to his capacity to produce the *philosophical sublime*. Shaftesbury writes that Homer:

> … retained only what was decent of the figurative or metaphoric style, introduced the natural and simple; and turned his thoughts towards the real beauty of composition, the unity of design, the truth of characters, and the just imitation of nature in each particular (*Characteristics*: 109).

Firstly, like the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury emphasises simplicity of language as the mark of the *philosophical sublime*, that is, 'the real beauty of composition.' Such beautiful simplicity is understood to reflect Homer's greatness of thought. Secondly, consistent with the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury considers that the *philosophical sublime* in poetry genuinely imitates our true nature. Evidently, Shaftesbury denies that following the rhetorical precepts of the *sublime style* is the method — the art, as the right technique or practice — of the *philosophical sublime*. Indeed, on his charge the *sublime style's* unnatural complications make it the opposite of the right art of the *philosophical sublime*.

It is now clear that Shaftesbury's usage of the term 'sublime' conforms to the Longinian Tradition's distinction between the *sublime style*

and the *philosophical sublime*. Throughout the *Characteristics* Shaftesbury appears to consistently applies the *true sublime* to his understanding of the *philosophical sublime* and the *false sublime* to the *sublime style*. Along with the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury considers that the contrast between the *true* and *false* corresponds with the natural and unnatural, respectively. For the Longinian Tradition, as seen described by Dennis, our genuine nature finitely imitates God's infinitely divine nature; thus the *true sublime* is caused by the divine. In turn Shaftesbury uses the *true sublime* to pick out instances of the 'divine' (*Characteristics*: 27). He goes on to associate the term sublime with solemnity (*Characteristics*: 109, 110), gravity (*Characteristics*: 8, 110), nobility (*Characteristics*: 114), and seriousness (*Characteristics*: 8, 296). He explicitly applies it to 'reason' (*Characteristics*: 6), 'human passions' (*Characteristics*: 27), 'virtue' (*Characteristics*: 48), 'sentiments and actions' (*Characteristics*: 93), and human 'characters' (*Characteristics*: 149). In general, here, he is using the term sublime (in its true sense) to emphasise the presence of the divine in all aspects of human and worldly nature. Conversely, Shaftesbury asserts that the *false sublime* gives the mere appearance of the *true sublime*'s nobility, but it is actually an individual's inclination or propensity to strong tones, passions, and actions (*Characteristics*: 93). He explicitly associates it not only with pomposity (*Characteristics*: 108), but also 'wit and fancy' (*Characteristics*: 93), and 'dissonance and disproportion' (*Characteristics*: 93).

The contrast between the *true* and *false sublime* is put into relief in the passage from the *Soliloquy* that follows directly on from the one quoted immediately above (that is, *Characteristics*: 109). Again appealing to Aristotle's account, Shaftesbury claims that in imitation of Homer the emergent ancient dramatic form of tragedy expresses the *true sublime*. Shaftesbury writes: 'Tragedy…took [from Homer] what was most solemn and [truly] sublime' (*Characteristics*: 110). Correspondingly, the dramatic form of comedy develops as a regulator of the *false sublime*; that is, it 'was of admirable use to explode the false sublime of early poets…The pompous orators were its never-failing subjects' (*Characteristics*: 110). Significantly,

Shaftesbury's use of the term sublime, though regularly directed at objects (including natural scenes and poetry), describes the nature of the creator (divine or human) mind (present in them). Again like Dennis, Shaftesbury connects the capacity to experience the divine creator's mind with the production of sublime poetry and literature. He advances that 'the moral artist' such as Homer 'can thus imitate the Creator' (*Characteristics*: 93) to express the *philosophical sublime*. So Shaftesbury shares the Longinian Tradition's aim to determine the nature of the *sublime genius*. Yet also like much of the Longinian Tradition, the use of the term sublime is confusingly complicated by being applied ironically and as mock praise. So to some extent Shaftesbury's usage remains unclear because he often relies on context and general familiarity of the reader to differentiate his application of the term sublime as the complimentary *true* or the derogatory *false*.

Although it is now clear that his general usage of the term sublime is completely consistent with the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury does apply it on one occasion that goes beyond the accounts of poetry. At the close of *The Moralists,* Part III, Section 1, Philocles tells us that:

> Theocles was now resolved to take his leave of the sublime, the morning spent and the forenoon by this time well advanced (*Characteristics*: 316).

This is the instance that Marjorie Hope Nicolson appeals to when she makes her case that Shaftesbury performing a terminological shift; that is, applying the literary critical term sublime from poetry to the distinct aesthetic concept of grandeur in physical nature (as discussed in Chapter 1 §7). She is, indeed, correct to say that the appearance of the term sublime here 'surprises' (Nicolson, 1959, p. 143). In the preceding 86 pages of *The Moralists,* the term sublime appears just three times and then only for

descriptive emphasis of the divine.[59] However, quoted here 'the sublime' is employed not as a mere emphatic description, but as the thing being described, making it more than a mere rhetorical emphasis of the divine. Leading to the question: what is Philocles actually referring to in the section as 'sublime'? What is it exactly that Theocles is meant to be taking leave of?

Theocles's 'fit' that Shaftesbury Calls Sublime

The Moralists, Part III, Section 1, is premised on sage Theocles's promise to his student of philosophy, Philocles, that he is to have the most philosophical experience of his moral education yet (*Characteristics*: 296). They plan to go to the woods for it. The morning they plan to go, Theocles heads up the forested hill before Philocles wakes. When Philocles catches Theocles up, Philocles 'passionately' complains that he is being denied witnessing Theocles's 'serious' thoughts, as originally promised (*Characteristics*: 296). This vignette is meant to alert the reader both to the *seriousness* of the activity that Theocles plans to undertake, and that Philocles's newfound, though still rudimentary, capacity for philosophical enthusiastic *passion* gives him the potential to come to experience it for himself. Reconciled, they commence their original plan, as Theocles puts it, to:

> … find our sovereign genius, if we can charm the genius of the place…to inspire us with a truer song of nature, teach us some celestial hymn and make us feel divinity present in these solemn places of retreat (*Characteristics*: 297).

Basically, in the solitude of the woods Theocles is going to become inspired — by the attendant natural spirits of that location, the *genii loci,* no

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[59] The 86 pages is the count in the Klein version. The specific preceding references to the sublime are: 'such a sublime, heroic passion' (Philocles on Theocles' feeling of friendship) *Characteristics*: 255; 'more sublime instruction' (Theocles on religious love) *Characteristics*: 269; as an exception Philocles uses 'sublime it' as in chemical sublimation, which appears metaphorical, *Characteristics*: 278; 'animated with a sublime celestial spirit' (Theocles describing the divine universe) *Characteristics*: 309.

less — in order to directly experience the divine, while Philocles watches on.[60] To use Costelloe's words, this 'ecstatic experience' is what Theocles takes leave of and Philocles picks out with the term sublime.

Embodied by Theocles and observed by Philocles, what Shaftesbury calls 'sublime' here is a striking undertaking. Philocles asks Theocles to give it voice. His musings reveal that the experience requires him to be in this particular sort of location of 'fields and woods' for 'retreat and thoughtful solitude' (*Characteristics*: 298). These conditions suit our human design 'for contemplation' and to 'best meditate the cause of things' (*Characteristics*:298), where the cause of things refers to the divine in nature. He enters a harmonious state of mind with the natural divine. He is 'thus inspired with harmony of thought…and sing of nature's order,' where 'all thought is lost' in the 'boundless, unsearchable, impenetrable' divine (*Characteristics*: 298); which is also the guiding thoughts in the experience 'be thou [divine nature] my assistant and guide me in this pursuit' (*Characteristics*: 299). Breaking from his state, Philocles says that Theocles 'stopped short and, starting, as out of a dream' (*Characteristics*: 299). And Theocles asks:

> 'Now Philocles,' said he, 'inform me: how have I appeared to you in my fit? Seemed it a sensible kind of madness, like those transports which are permitted to our poets? Or was it downright raving?' (*Characteristics*: 299)

In the mouth of Theocles, Shaftesbury directly compares his state of mind that he is calling sublime — that is, 'a sensible kind of madness' — with the Longinian Tradition's genuine *philosophical sublime* — that is, 'those transports which are permitted to our poets.'

In order to understand the shift from poetry to philosophy in Shaftesbury, it is important to identify where his comparison comes

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[60] Throughout Part III, Section 1, Theocles recognisably enters and exits this state three times, and although the point where he enters the state is not obvious he finally 'takes leave' of it a fourth time. These entries and exits can be seen as per the *Characteristics* on the pages listed here: Enter p. 298—Exit p. 299; Enter p. 307 —Exit p. 310; Enter p. 310—Exit p. 312; (perhaps enthusiasm rather than the sublime proper) Enter p. 213—Exit p. 316.

together with and apart from the Longinian Tradition. On the existing picture, especially as suggested by Nicolson, Shaftesbury is simply borrowing the Longinian Traditions' rhetorical term to describe his concept of grandeur, as the experience of awesome physical nature (recall Chapter 1, §7). When viewed as a terminological shift, Shaftesbury's simile 'like… poets' can only be rhetorical. As such, he is using it to rhetorically, to persuade, the reader that his proposed experience of nature is no more 'mad' than the already accepted poetic transports (and to distance it from religious enthusiastic raving). Alternatively, he might be thought to be employing an analogy, perhaps where the effect of the sublime poetry and the grand in nature share some similar features. On this view, it might simply be that both involve transport. Or as seen in the Chapter 1, §5 discussion, certain elements of Dennis and the Longinian that Tradition anticipate the *aesthetic sublime* might be appealed to, particularly the notion or description of terrible delight.

However, I counter that Shaftesbury is actually offering a synthesis of the two concepts, that is, the *philosophical sublime* applied to poetry and the grand as the awesome experience of physical nature. This is in order to establish his enthusiastic philosophy. In turn he is better understood to hold that the Longinian Tradition's *philosophical sublime* ('the transport of poets') and the affective experience of the naturally grand ('a sensible kind of madness') involve the *same* harmonious state of mind. As in the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury is offering an account of the human capacity to experience our genuine nature. While still advocating that poetry rightly expresses the *philosophical sublime*, Shaftesbury offers an explanation of how the *sublime genius* in contemplation can create a proper image of God's divine nature. Recall that Dennis describes this capacity of the *sublime genius* to create such an image of the divine, to spontaneously feel enthusiasm. But where Dennis does not explain how it is generated in contemplation, just that it is, Shaftesbury's account offers such an explanation from his certain experience of physical nature. Nevertheless, unlike the Longinian Tradition's *sublime genius* who can judge and express

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the *philosophical sublime* in poetry, Shaftesbury is interested in the genuine genius philosopher who rightly gains knowledge of the human and of society.

A more fitting description, then, of the shift of the *philosophical sublime* seen in Shaftesbury is from the mind of the poet to the mind of the philosopher. As with the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury is engaging with the central political and intellectual question that asks: what constitutes the best moral character, our true human nature? And how do we genuinely attain it? Both the Longinian Tradition and Shaftesbury attempt to answer this with accounts of the true genius. A difference between the two appears in the differing aims of the poet and the philosopher, which is reflected in the division in the Ancients and Moderns debate between literature and knowledge. The Longinian Tradition describes the harmonious state that the poetic genius attains to experience, judge and produce the *philosophical sublime* in poetry. The focus is on the relevant *art* (as a poetic technique or method, rather than rules) that develops the capacity to judge great poetry from the merely rhetorically persuasive. For the Longinian Tradition, the importance of sublime poetry is that it correctly develops the virtuous character. In contrast, Shaftesbury is describing how it is possible for the philosophical genius to genuinely come to *know* true nature. He is giving an account of the actual practice of philosophy of the *philosophical sublime*, with the aim to become a true genius.

To get a full grasp on Shaftesbury's *philosophical sublime* as a specific philosophical practice, I shall first set out the basics of his enthusiastic philosophy, in which it is located.

§2   Shaftesbury's Enthusiastic Philosophy

Although the various aspects of Shaftesbury's philosophical view are

developed and maintained throughout the *Characteristics*, *The Moralists* is meant to be a complete demonstration of his practice of enthusiastic philosophy. So what is actually going on in it? One way to get a sense of an answer is to look closely at the parts of his sub-title *A Philosophical Rhapsody, Being a Recitation of Certain Conversations, On Natural and Moral Subjects*. Firstly, following Pat Rogers' analysis, Shaftesbury is using *A Philosophical Rhapsody* as a 'verbal surprise'; for his contemporary audience, it appears oxymoronic (1972, p. 244). In *Shaftesbury and the Aesthetics of Rhapsody*, Rogers identifies three phases of the usage of the term 'rhapsody.' The ancient classical sense was 'epic recitation'; next, it was applied to a miscellany, or string of poems; lastly, and usually derogatorily, for an 'effusive outpouring of sentiment' (1972, p. 247). She suggests that Shaftesbury purposefully applies the then pejorative term, with its earlier meaning of a miscellany or collection, echoing the original epic recitation, to positively express his serious philosophy (Rogers, 1972, p. 253). Unlike the prevailing philosophical systems, this appeal to a poetic miscellany offers him the right sort of stylistic freedom to express his proposed intellectual freedom; that is, his sense of harmony instead of uniform demonstration, and organic rather than mechanist thinking, and true enthusiasm opposed to moderate scepticism (Rogers, 1972, pp. 253-255). Thus, Shaftesbury considers that style in this sense (that is, how philosophy is presented and communicated) is philosophically important.

Shaftesbury furthers the importance of style to philosophy with the next part of his sub-title: *Being a Recital of Certain Conversations. The Moralist* is a dialogue. He considers that philosophical dialogue is central to accessing and conveying genuine knowledge and good sense; suggesting that Plato's dialogues present the best style for philosophy (*Characteristics*: 89, 114). Shaftesbury reasons that the dialogue truly reflects the human mind, that is, both how we actually think, and our relation to the universe. Holding a similar view to the Longinian Tradition of nature being harmonious order, Shaftesbury argues that humans are inherently part of that natural system. As such, we do not have the ability to observe the

universe or our own mind independently of our part in it. In turn, his necessary partiality or perspectivalism, denies that we can ever form an objective view of nature. (On Shaftesbury's account, it is not even clear that God has an independent view, just the infinite view of the entire system that God created and is composed of.) Thus, he charges the prevailing philosophical treatise of being a misleading form of presenting and communicating philosophy because it pretends to offer objectivity, and linear, step-wise intellectual understanding, where it is not possible. Instead, Shaftesbury argues that the dialogue captures a multiplicity of views, which allows it to create a full picture, without undermining its perspectival nature; while it also mimics the natural variable order of thought that meanders to and from and back to ideas.

Finally, *On Natural and Moral Subjects* in the sub-title points to the question of the real content and purpose of philosophy. According to Shaftesbury, philosophy's goal is knowledge through the cultivation of our genuine human nature and society. By identifying moral good with true nature, he holds that philosophy cannot merely describe our nature but must make it better, that is, instructs us of our best nature making us truly good. In the context of his famed proclamation of the foolishness of a system, he writes: 'I shall willingly allow it to pass for philosophy when by any real effects it is proved capable to refine our spirits, improve our understandings or mend our manners' (*Characteristics*: 129). His charge of foolishness, then, is directed at any philosophical system that only aims to give descriptions of the appearance of the world, especially Cartesian metaphysical discussions of material and immaterial substance. Shaftesbury complains that the apparent knowledge that is gained by these 'searchers of mode and substance' evidently does not enrich their 'passions and sentiments' such that it could give them a distinguished 'magnanimity' (*Characteristics*: 130). Instead, he posits that the proper understanding and beneficial cultivation of nature can only be achieved through the examination of the self as both a rational, and, importantly, passionate being. For the whole human, our reasons and our passions,

must be cultivated for us to truly come to know and be our best possible natures.

Bringing these parts of the sub-title together reveals that the 'moralists' of the title are Shaftesbury's particular brand of moral philosopher. Although he takes natural philosophy's new science (that aims at describing physical nature) to be valuable, he considers that true philosophy necessarily must benefit human and worldly good. In this respect, he holds that there is only *moral* philosophy, which is further understood to be centred on the ancient question of how to live, making philosophy a practice for life (where practice is sense of art found in the Longinian Tradition, and its contemporaries). Also be aware that in this instance moral philosophy is understood in the broader early modern sense that encompasses the whole of human nature, and human and worldly goods; that is, the full scope of modern philosophical fields (including metaphysics, epistemology, ethics but also fields now outside or bordering philosophy, such as psychology). In *The Moralists*, Shaftesbury's protagonists Palemon and Theocles are meant to exemplify the right sort of philosophical lives. They importantly have 'an extravagant passion for philosophy' (*Characteristics*: 231). In contrast, the dialogue's narrator Philocles starts out as a fashionable gentleman who 'bemoans philosophy' (*Characteristics*: 232). He begins with the view of a moderate sceptic. This is seen, when, unlike his friend, the genius Palemon, Philocles initially describes himself as an 'indifferent lover' who moderates his passion to avoid the danger of its excess (*Characteristics*: 231–32); and when, Theocles pronounces Philocles as a Pyrrhonist, stating: 'Philocles, though you disown philosophy, are yet so true a proselyte to Pyrrhonism' (*Characteristics*: 301). This highlights Shaftesbury's aim to reinstate true enthusiasm as the proper philosophical passion, while subverting the Pyrrhonian sceptic's questioning of it. Overall for Shaftesbury, philosophy is fundamentally a moral enquiry that centres on and is built up from the idea of good.

The nature of goodness, on Shaftesbury's account, is the reciprocal

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of his view that the universe is a harmonious, co-operative system. So starting with his account of the universe, he takes this natural cosmic order to be self-evident in the world, and innate to human nature. Like the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury appeals to the period's general notion of nature that is grounded in the observation of natural order in the physical universe (see Chapter 2, §4). Although he first directly appeals to his universal system in *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit,* (henceforth, *An Inquiry* (*Characteristics*: 163–230)) he most eloquently describes it in the mouth of Theocles in *The Moralists*. While walking in the fields with his companions, Theocles observes the ordered perfection surrounding them. He posits that the idea of order is innate when he says:

> Nothing surely is more imprinted on our minds or more closely interwoven with our souls than the idea or sense of order and proportion (*Characteristics*: 273).

Indeed (again like the Longinian Tradition) Shaftesbury claims that we have the natural capacity to perceive this order; that is, as 'a plain internal sensation' (*Characteristics*: 274) of 'a difference between harmony and discord, cadency and convulsion!' (*Characteristics*: 273). Throughout, Shaftesbury emphasises that this worldly order is analogous with musical harmony; that is, we sense worldly order, universal harmony, in the same way we sense musical harmony (and its opposite, discord).

From our natural human capacity to sense the natural harmonious order, Theocles reasons that actual designed order must exist throughout the universe. First he claims:

> … that whatever things have order, the same have unity of design and concur in one, are parts constituent of one whole or are, in themselves, entire systems. Such is a tree with all its branches, an animal with all its members, and an edifice with all its exterior and interior ornaments. (*Characteristics*: 274)

And he immediately continues with the musical analogy:

> What else is even a tune or symphony or an excellent piece of music than a certain system of proportioned sounds? (*Characteristics*: 274)

While the 'particular systems' or 'single parts' — such as the mentioned

tree, animal, or edifice — might exhibit unified design 'in themselves' these parts must also all be united within the whole system of the universe. The reason, he further claims, is that if there is 'no coherence in the whole, there can be no order' (*Characteristics*: 274); that is, there cannot be individual order without universal order. Following Theocles's description, for Shaftesbury, our capacity to observe the order of individual things or parts, lends itself to observing the unification of all the parts in the universe.

Despite the limits of the finite human mind to be able to comprehend the entire system (*Characteristics*: 275), Theocles points out that natural unification of the universe's parts can be evidently observed throughout the world. This he describes at vivid length:

> All things in this world are united. For as the branch is united with the tree, so is the tree as immediately with the earth, air and water which feed it… so much are the very leaves, the seeds and fruits of these trees fitted to the various animals: these again to one another and to the elements where they live… as either by wings for the air, fins for the water, feet for the earth… Thus, in contemplating all on earth, we much of necessity view all in one as held to one common stock. Thus too in the system of the bigger world. See there the mutual dependency of things, the relation of one to another, of the sun to this inhabited earth and of the earth and other planets to the sun, the order, union and coherence of the whole! (*Characteristics*: 274–5)

In light of Theocles's description, Shaftesbury holds that this observable 'unity of design' implies that there must be a universal designer. And that our innate capacity to observe it could only have been put there by that designer.

Shaftesbury argues that it is self-evident in the observation of physical nature that an 'active mind' has designed it. On Theocles's telling:

> Now having recognized this uniform consistent fabric and owned the universal system, we must of consequence acknowledge a universal mind, which no ingenious man can be tempted to disown except through the imagination of disorder in the universe, its seat (*Characteristics*: 276).

Shaftesbury's overall argument for design is as follows: For there to be

actual harmonious order in the parts of the world, the entire universe must be a unified harmoniously ordered system. Such order is designed, and all design requires a designing mind. Because human minds evidently observe ordered design in the parts of the world, leading from that we can imaginatively observe the design of the entire universe. He concludes that there is a divine designing mind. He further holds that the observed natural order is evidence of God's presence in all nature; that is, where there is order there is God, and vice versa. This makes Shaftesbury's account consistent with the naturalised understanding of God adopted by the Longinian Tradition (Chapter 2, §4), where the natural designing mind is also immanent in the harmonious order of the universe.

Turning to his initial discussion of his argument for his God-designed harmoniously, ordered system in *An Inquiry*, Shaftesbury sets it out in terms of good or interest. He argues that all things — human, animal, vegetable, worlds, galaxies — form part of this cosmic order, where each part must be designed to co-operatively sustain the *good* of the whole. Every part, then, has its own particular purpose, its 'end,' determined by its natural constitution in relation to the universal system (*Characteristics*: 167). Indeed, it gives us humans a natural inclination toward — what Shaftesbury describes as 'affection' for — the harmony (that is, order and proportion) of parts. For him, then, a good is anything that best promotes the well-being of the system. As such, a creature's genuine private good — its individual interest — simply becomes the public good of its species, in turn becoming the good of other species, so on and so forth, extrapolating across the entire system, making it the interest of the entire universe (*Characteristics*:168–9). In this way, a thing is truly good when it best conforms to its designed nature, that is, its purpose within the universal system.

On this picture, Shaftesbury advances that our true human nature is our God-given order and co-operative purpose within the system, and the natural is whatever conforms to God-given order. Conversely, the unnatural is whatever goes against our true nature, any instance of dis-

order. Although he allows 'private ills' for the sake of the system (primarily, an individual creature's death for the health of another), on his view there are no *general ills* where a part, by its design, is a thoroughgoing ill for the entire system (*Characteristics*: 169–71). For there to be such an imperfection in the general design of the universal system would not only deny a truly harmonious system but also the possibility of goodness altogether. The reason for this is that it would deny the possibility of the optimal good functioning of the system as a whole, that is, the universal good of the system. Thus, an *ill* is only the irregular or unnatural functioning of a part in which it deviates from its designed purpose (*Characteristics*: 172). Again this is consistent with the Longinian Tradition, which considers that conforming to our true human nature, our natural order, is our virtuous good, and that going against our nature is unnatural vicious deviancy.

Shaftesbury further observes that the perfectly good design of the universal system points to a necessarily perfectly good designing mind. Specifically, that God's mind has the capacity to form natural order, that is, a universally good system (*Characteristics*: 165). Shaftesbury holds that all minds, human and God's, are a creative power. This only becomes clear in his discussion of beauty in *The Moralists*, where he describes the creator–mind as the form of beauty. Here he establishes that minds are 'the *forms which form*, that is, [the kind] which have intelligence, action and operation'(original emphasis, *Characteristics*: 323). He contrasts this with the 'dead forms … which bear a fashion and are formed, whether by man or nature, but have no forming power, action and operation'; examples found in nature are 'metal and stones' (*Characteristics*: 323). Although finite human minds have the capacity to create dead forms, that is, human artifice (a pertinent example being poetry), it is God's mind that is the infinite forming form that created the entire universe — that is, all natural dead forms, and finite forming forms (other minds). Significantly, the universal divine creator gives the human mind the capacity to observe the natural order and (re-)create it.

In this context, Shaftesbury's God is the highest artist, containing all the beauty of the universe (*Characteristics*: 323). He argues

> … that which fashions even minds themselves contains in itself all the beauties fashioned by those minds and is consequently the principle, source and fountain of all beauty (*Characteristics*: 324).

So, along with being perfectly good, Shaftesbury's God is perfectly beautiful. This is reflects his claim that beauty and good are 'one and the same' (*Characteristics*: 320, see also 254–5, 327). Relatedly, in *Sensus Communis, an Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour* (*Characteristics*: 29–69) (henceforth, *Sensus Communis*) he argues that 'all beauty is truth,' going on to identify the right manifestation of truth in art (*Characteristics*: 65, see also pp. 65-8). Therefore, Shaftesbury takes the Platonic tripartite of good, beauty, and truth, to be identical in, and with, God. Furthermore, all three are the natural forms of the harmonious order of the universe. On these grounds, the movement from disorder to order brings about knowledge, goodness, and a beautiful nature.

Focusing on the perfect goodness of God, Shaftesbury holds that to rightly judge the perfectly good is simply to rightly judge what is God. It follows for him that True Religion is any proper moral pursuit of the good. Remembering that Shaftesbury falls on the side of the Ancients, this permits him to argue that ancient knowledge, its search for virtue, cannot be dismissed or automatically assumed inferior in light of its paganism. This is while he also maintains that his theological commitments advocate and are consistent with Christianity, which he criticises for appealing to the promises of future goods or punishments as the way to virtue (*Characteristics*: 183). Importantly, he casts philosophy in the same way; recall he stated that its aim is to refine spirits, improve understanding, and mend manners — that is, to become good. On his account, then, for both True Religion and philosophy the aim is to become God-like. This is meant to guard Shaftesbury's cosmological view and broader philosophy against

the charge of atheism.[61] Yet, it also raises a question about what grounds his philosophical practice, specifically, how do we come to genuinely know and become good/God-like?

Shaftesbury considers that the only way we can discover the answer to this question is through rational examination of the self, reflecting on our own mind. This arises out of his understanding of the design of the human mind and the cosmic system. As a forming form, the human mind is a finite version of God's infinite divine mind. By properly examining our mind, he advances that we might not only discover our genuine nature and purpose within the system, but also genuinely come to know and be moved by God's divine nature; that is, know genuine good, beauty, and truth. On his account, such an enquiry is rational because it appeals to reasons, and moral because it aims at our good. He takes reflection to be vital for successful reasoning; everything — including appearances, feelings, and even reasons — should be continually reflected upon to ensure their ongoing veracity and to understand their place within the universal system. He demands we pursue an argument wherever it takes us, even into what we feel is 'detestable,' or undermines our deepest held dogmas (*Characteristics*: 260). As such, as true philosophers we must be prepared to relinquish our existing certainties and no view should be held by force, threat, or coercion; we must change our minds through reasons and reasoning alone. For Shaftesbury, this is genuine philosophical freedom. Nevertheless, in virtue of the finitude of our minds he acknowledges the limits of our knowledge.

Once more in the mouth of Theocles, Shaftesbury admits the limits of the human mind. In relation to observing the universal system, he says:

> For in an infinity of things thus relative, a mind which sees not infinitely can see nothing fully and, since each particular has relation to all in general it can know no perfect or true relation of

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61 Shaftesbury defines Theism as: 'that everything is governed, ordered or regulated for the best by a designing principle or mind, necessarily good and permanent'; and atheism as 'to believe nothing of a designing principle or mind nor any cause measure or rule of things but chance' (*Characteristics*: 165).

anything in a world not perfectly and fully known (*Characteristics*: 275).

As parts of the system, all humans can only partially view its workings from their own perspective, and never form nor express a completely unified view of it as a whole. Nevertheless, having direct access to the working of our own minds, our thought and reason, we can still come to know true nature. In conjunction with this Shaftesbury holds that our principal nature is to cultivate our thought and reason in society; for him, this is what differentiates humans from brutes and beasts. Taken together, Shaftesbury considers that our perspectivalism and natural society has important implications for legitimate philosophical practice. Foremost, he considers that philosophical practice is fundamentally a discursive, public activity. Significantly, for him, this reconnects philosophy and politics, the separation of which he thinks is the greatest error of his age (*Characteristics*: 234). Also, for these practical reasons, he argues that philosophy needs to reprise the ancient art of dialogue (as mentioned, *The Moralists* is his exemplar).

Shaftesbury compares the effect of dialogue to a moral painting: like the layers of paint being built up to create a full picture, in a philosophical dialogue the layering of views builds up to express (or at least approximate) full understanding (*Characteristics*: 234). In *The Moralists,* Shaftesbury aims to demonstrate such a layering effect of dialogue. It is a complex piece that tells and retells, layer upon layer, the way of being a philosopher and conducting proper moral inquiry. As its narrator, Philocles' recollects his conversion from moderate sceptic to enthusiastic lover of philosophy. His retelling moves from conversation to conversation, player to player, place to place, scene to scene. The conversation meanders and digresses, yet reprises and reviews ideas in various and unexpected ways. Shaftesbury holds that these meanderings and reprisals mirror the natural behaviour of our mind. It is often taken for granted that the sage Theocles is Shaftesbury's singular and authoritative mouthpiece; however, each participant, along with the manner and context of each discussion, is

relevant and significant to the presentation of his view. Indeed, Theocles rarely directly states his own view; rather, through questioning (both actual and rhetorical) he draws Philocles towards his own answers. Shaftesbury's design is that, along with Philocles, the reader of *The Moralists* simultaneously engages with Theocles's questioning, and comes to discover a love of philosophy for themselves.

The art of dialogue seen in *The Moralists* reveals two related aspects of Shaftesbury's philosophical practice: imitation and example. Firstly, like the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury has a nuanced understanding of imitation that is rooted in Aristotle and ancient poetry and rhetoric. Shaftesbury, too, claims that poetic genius results from a poet's ability to imitate true nature, and that the instructive value of poetry is to move that nature in us: to ensure that we are moved in the right ways, that is, by genuine nature and not merely the appearance of it. And our own internal harmony needs to be cultivated through such imitation. Ultimately, like the poet, the philosopher will imitate harmonious, ordered nature; that is, become good/God-like. Nevertheless, initially, such imitation is of (and requires guidance from) the wise. Secondly, then, the philosophically wise form an example of the right sort of imitation. Because proper imitation cannot be achieved through mere rule following, or description, it requires demonstration — the adage of show not tell. This is evident when Theocles keeps repeating that he cannot tell Philocles the nature of things — the good — he can only show him. But what, it might be asked, is actually being cultivated?

While he holds that goodness is acting in the interest of the universal system, Shaftesbury makes the further claim that human virtue is performing such goods for the right reasons. To put it another way, he thinks that a good action can only be considered virtuous if it has been performed under the right motivation. Recall that Shaftesbury's complaint against the prevailing foolish philosophical systems is that they fail to enrich our 'passions and sentiments' to achieve 'magnanimity.' Highlighting, that Shaftesbury's claimed aim of philosophy to make us

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better is achieved primarily through the cultivation of our passions, specifically, what he calls affections. Although there is some overlap and apparent interchangeability, Shaftesbury generally applies the term 'affection' to a feeling for something, that is a passion directed at (notably) society, and friends; while the term 'passion' applies to the general movement of feeling (the precursor of the term emotion). For an affection to be virtuous it must be appropriately motivated, that is, be the right sort of passion (feeling) directed at the right sort of object (action). Significantly, Shaftesbury denies the philosophy can be separated from passion, arguing that true philosophy must be enthusiastic. Thus, like Dennis, Shaftesbury wants to reclaim the positive sense of the term enthusiasm. Basically, enthusiasm is the strong passion inspired by God's divine nature that gives us true affection for, love for, the universe and each other.

§3 The Philosophical Enthusiasm of Shaftesbury's Enthusiastic Philosophy

Early on in *The Moralists*, Shaftesbury introduces his sense of philosophical enthusiasm as the passionate love, the affection, of God's divine nature. Here, Philocles says to Palemon 'you continued to urge me till by necessity I was drawn into the following vein of philosophical enthusiasm' (*Characteristics*: 243). Philocles finds himself 'taking a grave air' and reflects on his strain of 'melancholy' (*Characteristics*: 243). Recall from Chapter 2, §4, melancholy is being used as another name for enthusiasm (see, Heyd, 1995, pp. 44–64). Shaftesbury distinguishes his philosophical enthusiasm from the disordered fancy of the falsely inspired, (the melancholic) when Philocles is persuaded that it is not the result of 'any of those fantastical causes' (*Characteristics*: 243). Instead Philocles realises that:

> Love, doubtless, is at the bottom [of his melancholy/enthusiasm] but a nobler love than such as common beauties inspire (*Characteristics*: 243).

Specifically, it is the love of beauty, described as 'that which is highest in the kind,' moreover, 'the supreme beauty' (*Characteristics*: 243–244): that is, God's divine nature. Clearly, Shaftesbury is repeating Dennis's understanding of enthusiasm as the strong passion excited during the contemplation of, or meditation on, ideas of God's divine nature. Indeed, Shaftesbury's account mirrors and extends the role of strong passion and transport towards the divine seen in the Longinian Tradition.

The relation of strong passion with the idea of the divine is initially seen in Shaftesbury's *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm*, (henceforth, *A Letter*). There he describes enthusiasm as:

> Something there will be of extravagance and fury [i.e., strong passion] when the ideas or images received are too big for the narrow human vessel to contain [i.e., images of the infinite divine, which is too big for the finite human] (*Characteristics*: 27).

Also like Dennis, and the Longinian Tradition in general, Shaftesbury associates this enthusiastic passion with Longinus's sublime effect of irresistible transport, as seen when Shaftesbury points to the 'transports of poets' in *The Moralists* (*Characteristics*: 320). But, the association is clearest in *Miscellany II* where, falling short of a 'precise' definition (*Characteristics*: 351), Shaftesbury describes enthusiasm as the passions arising from:

> … a power in numbers, harmony, proportion and beauty of every kind, which naturally captivates the heart and raises the imagination to an opinion or conceit of something majestic and divine.

> Whatever this subject may be in itself, *we cannot help being transported by the thought of it*. It inspires us with something more than ordinary and raises us above ourselves (my emphasis, *Characteristics*: 352).

Like Dennis, then, Shaftesbury distinguishes enthusiasm from everyday, ordinary passions and connects it with the experience of the divine. In this case, he understands God as being harmonious order.

More so than Dennis and the Longinian Tradition in general, Shaftesbury exploits the ancient sense of enthusiasm as *possession by a*

God,[62] specifically in terms of the poetic Muses (*Characteristics*: 4–7, 140–41). For instance, with allusions to the Ancients and Moderns debate, he claims that the advantage of the ancients is due to successfully 'address[ing] themselves to some Muse' (*Characteristics*: 4), whereas, Shaftesbury wonders why the practice has become 'so spiritless and awkward in a modern' (*Characteristics*: 5). Along with the poetic muses he similarly refers to the influence of nymphs, the spirits of nature, especially those of the woods. As seen above regarding Theocles, most significantly for the *philosophical sublime* is that the *genii loci* — the geniuses or spirits of place (*Characteristics*: 297, see also *Characteristics*: 257).[63] On Shaftesbury's terms, the divine is any instance or manifestation of God's mind, that is, harmonious order. The term spirit, it seems, refers to the particular instance where the human mind is moved or transported by divinity. Such movement of the mind is enthusiastic inspiration, when it is caused by the genuine divine he describes it as 'noble enthusiasm' (*Characteristics*: 28).

Yet again, like Dennis, Shaftesbury is fully aware of the dangers of re-appropriating the term enthusiasm. Both of them distance their positive enthusiasm from the negative sense applied to religious zealotry and fanaticism at that time. However, Shaftesbury does more to explicitly distinguish the two senses. In *A Letter* he describes the distinction as: 'For inspiration is a real feeling of the Divine Presence and enthusiasm a false one' (*Characteristics*: 27). He immediately draws attention to the well-known difficulty that, nonetheless, 'the passion they raise is much alike' (*Characteristics*: 27). The problem is that apprehending either the 'real object or mere spectre of divinity' produces the same feeling of being

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[62] Oxford English Dictionary, *enthusiasm, n*. 1.a. See, Klein's footnote A in *Characteristics*: 4.

[63] Shaftesbury is critical of modern Christian practices and doctrine; (see *Characteristics*: 46) particularly, the doctrinal claim of future rewards or punishments. In contrast he thinks that Christian goodwill should be 'voluntary' like that of friendship. Shaftesbury is directly hostile to Catholicism, the so called 'popery'. Nevertheless, he still considers that his appeal to the Greek spiritual pantheon is consistent with Christianity understood as True Religion. He suggests that it is Christians' lack of imagination, which leads them to simply deny the heathen belief (*Characteristics*: 6).

'beyond life' (*Characteristics*: 27, further discussion in Chapter 4, §2). Thus, both the positive, true enthusiasm and the negative, false enthusiasm elicit the same passion (feeling). This is the case when Theocles is concerned that his 'fit' might be the problematic 'downright raving' of the period's religious enthusiast (*Characteristics*: 299, quoted §1 above). For Shaftesbury (and, indeed, Dennis and the Longinian Tradition), then, the fundamental difference lies only with the causal object of experience: the genuine divine opposed to the mere appearance of it. This leads to the question: if not by the passion raised, how do we know that (or when) we are experiencing the actual divine?[64]

Shaftesbury suggests that his noble enthusiasm can be rightly known through the self-reflective practices of his enthusiastic philosophy. In *A Letter,* he writes:

> For 'to judge the spirits whether they are of God,' we must antecedently 'judge our own Spirit,' whether it be of reason and sound sense, whether it be fit to judge at all by being sedate, cool and impartial, free of every biassing passion, every giddy vapour or melancholy fume. This is the first knowledge and previous judgement: 'To understand ourselves and know what spirit we are of' (*Characteristics*: 28).

Specifically, he takes true enthusiasm to be the passion of virtuous affections. Thus, by these self-reflective practices, we come to know our true nature, and then, can rightly identify the true divine. In virtue of this knowledge, we rightly direct our passions at the divine. As such, our noble enthusiasm becomes a properly motivated affection. Conversely, in the context of his view on religious toleration, and the role of humour for Shaftesbury, he considers that pedlars false enthusiasm just does not withstand the test of raillery; that is, where true ideas will withstand humoured mocking (*Characteristics*: 29–31, see further discussion Chapter 4, §3).

From *A Letter* Shaftesbury directs his reader to *An Inquiry Concerning*

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[64] The question is the focus of Chapter 4.

Virtue or Merit (henceforth, *An Inquiry*),[65] where he sets out this 'divine passion' describing for the first time the association of enthusiasm with love. This is where he introduces disinterestedness as love of the good, where we are motivated to feel affection for something for its own sake, opposed to, say, out of the desire to possess it.[66] Specifically, enthusiasm is the:

> … love of order, harmony and proportion, in whatever kind, is naturally improving to the temper, advantageous to social affection and highly assistant to virtue, which is itself no other than the love of order and beauty in society (*Characteristics*: 191).

Further on, he writes:

> For it is impossible that such a divine order should be contemplated without ecstasy and rapture since… whatever is according to just harmony and proportion is so transporting to those who have any knowledge or practice in the kind (*Characteristics*: 191).

Shaftesbury further directs his readers on to *The Moralists* to make the final link that ultimately his philosophical enthusiasm is simply the genuine love of beauty (*Characteristics*: 317–18, see also above, *Characteristics*: 243–244), which is the height of human good.

Throughout *The Moralists*, legitimate instances of enthusiasm are marked by a shift towards strong passion, which is regularly signified by the description of 'high strain' or 'moving air' (*Characteristics*: 238).[67] At first glance, it might appear that Shaftesbury's application of the term sublime in *The Moralists, Part III, Section 1,* is simply emphasising his general sense of enthusiasm (the divine passion). Indeed, from his initial use of

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[65] Shaftesbury extensively footnoted *The Characteristics* in order to direct his readers to the connections and developing ideas across it. Following his footnotes the reader is directed from *A Letter* to *An Inquiry*.

[66] The concept of disinterestedness in Shaftesbury is central to the claims of his significance to the history of aesthetics. See, especially (Stolnitz, 1961b; 1961c). However, I repeat it is not my purpose to establish his account of the aesthetic so I shall not be discussing this concept further here.

[67] The full quote: 'said you [Palemon] in a high strain and with a moving air of passion' (*Characteristics*: 238). Shaftesbury associates this sort of enthusiastic, disinterested love with the 'virtuosi,' who in his positive sense are men of taste (*Characteristics*: 320).

the terms in *A Letter,* the *philosophical sublime* and enthusiasm, along with inspiration, just look like different names for the same strong human passion, primarily, 'extravagance and fury' (*Characteristics*: 27). He writes:

> So that 'inspiration' may be justly called 'divine enthusiasm,' for the word itself signifies 'divine presence' and was made use of by the philosopher whom the earliest Christian Fathers called 'divine' to express whatever was sublime in human passions (*Characteristics*: 27).

However, at this point, Shaftesbury is using the term sublime in its general sense to emphasise the true presence of the divine (see §1 above). Shaftesbury tends to use 'inspiration' for an instance of true enthusiasm, with the specific meaning of being moved, that is *inspired* by the Muses or filled with spirit. In contrast, he tends to use 'enthusiasm' for the melancholic false enthusiasm, yet still holds that true enthusiasm is the proper affection, the passionate love, for the divine. Thus, enthusiasm is the strong passion, inspiration is the movement of the spirit, and in this instance the term sublime is being used by Shaftesbury to pick out the divine. So what constitutes his *philosophical sublime*?

§4   Shaftesbury's Philosophical Sublime

Shaftesbury's *philosophical sublime* is perhaps best understood as a special state of true enthusiasm. On his account, the *sublime state* is always attended by enthusiastic passion, the right affection for the divine, but not all instances of genuine enthusiasm are instances of the *philosophical sublime*. As already seen, true enthusiasm is the strong passion that can be raised across interactions in society, especially in 'grave' and 'serious' philosophical conversation. However, the *sublime state* is not merely this certain feeling of strong passion, and thus it is not reducible to true enthusiasm. Rather, repeating Dennis and the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury casts enthusiastic passion as the genuine *sublime effect*. Again like Dennis, from Shaftesbury's general sense of true enthusiasm, the

sublime cause is God's divine nature. However, according to Shaftesbury, unlike true enthusiasm in general, the *sublime state* requires contemplation in a place of solitude. Ideally, for Shaftesbury, this *sublime source* is the forested hills, which is why Theocles and Philocles meet there in *The Moralists*. And it is in this context that Shaftesbury applies the *philosophical sublime* to physical nature. According to him, true enthusiasm picks out the feeling associated with inspiration; whereas in the *sublime state* the spirit (of place) that inspires — that is, the harmonious, ordered mind of God — is directly apprehended.

It follows on Shaftesbury's account that the *philosophical sublime* is the harmonious state of mind, attended by enthusiastic passion, where the mind of God is directly and harmoniously apprehended. Such apprehension is possible because Shaftesbury argues that the human mind is a finite version of God's infinite mind; as such, they share a common nature. As discussed in §2 above, this commonality is established when Shaftesbury advances that the human mind not only has the capacity to observe natural order (as per the natural philosopher) but it also has the capacity to create it; that is, like God's mind, the human mind is a forming form (the designing artist). As such, the human mind can imaginatively create perfect order, in the same way that God's mind does. Importantly, as discussed in Dennis, and again in Shaftesbury, there are two senses of creation in mind going on here. One is that the human mind can create an image of the divine mind in our mind; the other is that in virtue of being able to create such an image of the divine mind, it is possible for humans to create, that is, re-produce or imitate, this divine image (in poetry, literature, fine art, etc). And the sublime genius has the capacity, the sort of human mind, to genuinely judge and produce the divine mind.

Like Dennis, Shaftesbury posits that this imaginative order created in the mind arises in contemplation or meditation. Unlike Dennis (who, as mentioned above, offers no explanation), Shaftesbury considers that contemplation must be done in a place where 'inspiration' is possible: in particular, woods and hills. This is because Shaftesbury's sense of harmony

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does not merely happen within the human mind, but it is where the human mind can be in harmony with God's mind. The location matters because he appeals to the *genii loci,* the geniuses or spirits of place, to properly inspire the human mind towards order, promoting its harmony with God's mind. It is difficult to tell whether (or to what extent) Shaftesbury is being literal or metaphorical in describing this spiritual movement. He does consider it to be a real movement of passions; however, it is not clear if he thinks such 'spirits' are real. Minimally, he is observing that woods and hills have a particular feel about them such that we can be moved in the right ways. Importantly, that right way results in our human mind being harmoniously indistinguishable from God's mind (as such, directly apprehending it). Ordinarily, finite humans only have a partial view of the whole universal system; we are just aware of our relation to, and feelings for, the other parts of the system. However, in contemplation the human mind no longer stands in relation to the parts and is lost (at least momentarily) in the infinite order of the universe. Thus, in the *sublime state* the human mind is in perfect harmony with the mind of God.

All of the elements of Shaftesbury's *philosophical sublime* are elaborated on, and recur, across *The Moralist,* especially Part III, Section 1. They are perhaps most concisely expressed in this eloquent passage, where amidst his *sublime state* Theocles proclaims:

> To thee this solitude, this place, these rural meditations are sacred while thus inspired with harmony of thought, though unconfined by words and in loose numbers, I sing of nature's order in created being and celebrate the beauties which resolve in thee, the source and principle of all beauty and perfection (*Characteristics*: 298).

Significantly, 'harmony of thought, though unconfined by words and in loose numbers'[68] indicates that Theocles has attained the height of harmony required to directly apprehend God's mind. He goes on to describe the losing of the sense of self, as God's 'being is boundless,

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68 Numbers refers to poetic metre (see Chapter 2 §3). Here it is used to be suggestive of the natural poetry of the universe unconfined by rhetoric.

unsearchable, impenetrable. In thy immensity all though is lost' (*Characteristics*: 298). And then the shock of the return from the state:

> … thus sallied forth into the wide expanse, when I return again within myself, struck with the sense of this so narrow being and the fullness of that immense one (*Characteristics*: 298–99).

Nevertheless, what does this *sublime state* — in Theocles words 'a sensible kind of madness' — have to do with philosophy?

The Conversion of Philocles

Philocles is a convert. Against his initial scepticism, against his ongoing fear of the dangers, and completely against fashion, he becomes an enthusiastic philosopher. His conversion is arduous. Days and nights of conversation, like at Plato's ancient academy; imitation of the noble passions, like the first poetic genius of Homer; a morning of solitary, contemplative transports in the woods where the mountains reach down to the sea. With the encouragement of his genius friend Palemon, and the instruction of the sagacious Theocles, Philocles examines the heights of divine nature and the depths of his own soul to truly become a lover, a philosophical enthusiast. Philocles's retelling of his conversion from moderate sceptic to philosophical enthusiast is the central narrative of Shaftesbury's *The Moralists*. Throughout, Philocles is being instructed by Theocles in the practices of a genuine philosophical life. Here Shaftesbury brings together and demonstrates his three philosophical practices — the art — of how to fulfil philosophy's aim of acquiring knowledge, which he describes over the course of the *Characteristics*.

Shaftesbury's philosophical practices each correspond with the three main aspects of his world-view. These are: the universal system, the human mind, and the mind of God. The first practice is discourse; that is, the dialogue conducted in society. Recall (§2 above) that Shaftesbury compares this sort of dialogue to moral painting, where the layering of multiple views creates a fuller picture than our partial view ever could on

its own. Taking society to be a microcosm of the universal system, this method gives us knowledge of how best to support and participate in the system as a whole — to best fulfil our purpose as a part of the universe, which promotes its general good. The second practice is soliloquy, which is the private practice of self-dialogue (see §2 above; see also Sellars, 2016). The basic idea is that by privately writing down our thoughts and questioning them we can test and develop our own judgement. This not only gives us knowledge of the workings of the human mind but also the means to develop and perfect the natural order of it. The third practice is the *philosophical sublime* where in contemplative solitude we come to truly know the mind of God, attended by enthusiastic passion.

Recall that out of all of the philosophical activities that they participate in throughout *The Moralists,* Philocles observing Theocles' enthusiastic transports was to be the height of philosophy (*Characteristics*: 296, see §2 above). For Shaftesbury, attaining the *sublime state* is the only way to truly get to know God's divine nature. Taking philosophy to be the pursuit of knowledge, engaging in the *philosophical sublime* is the only practice through which genuine knowledge of the design of the universe can be acquired. Ordinary observation (as per natural philosophy) of universal order only gives the reasons for holding that there is an immanent designing mind; whereas in contemplation we can actually come to know that mind. The contemplation requires solitude (the woods and hills of physical nature), which means not just 'retiring' from society but going to a place where we are best inspired, that is, feel enthusiasm (*Characteristics*: 249, 298). Because Shaftesbury equates moral virtue with natural order of the human mind, attaining the perfect *sublime state* also marks the height of human moral virtue. Thus, like the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury holds that the best and wisest character is the *sublime genius*. It might seem to follow that the *philosophical sublime* is ultimately the only philosophical practice we need; and perhaps the other two practices are just preparation for this highest state. However, Shaftesbury warns against too much solitude as it risks going from the

'sensible kind' to actual madness (false enthusiastic melancholy). Instead, he advocates maintaining a proper balance of all three practices to gain full philosophical knowledge and cultivate our true nature.

Having established in §1 above where the Longinian Tradition and Shaftesbury actually diverge regarding the *philosophical sublime*, it is now clear to see where their accounts converge. In parallel with Dennis and the Longinian Tradition's account of poetry, Shaftesbury's philosophy is engaging with the central political and intellectual question that asks: what constitutes the best moral character, our true human nature? And how do we genuinely attain it? Both Dennis and Shaftesbury attempt to answer it by appealing to the *sublime genius*, who has the capacity not only to observe harmoniously ordered nature but also to create it — making them the best and wisest character, the height of moral virtue and natural order. Significantly, as already seen in the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury makes no distinction between the genius's capacity as a true judge and true creator of the *philosophical sublime*. Like Dennis in particular, Shaftesbury describes the *sublime effect* in terms of true enthusiasm. Although focusing on different *sublime sources* (that is, poetry and physical nature), the Longinian Tradition and Shaftesbury agree that the *true sublime* is caused by God's divine nature, which is experienced in contemplation (also called meditation), that is, the *sublime state*. Both also agree that the *philosophical sublime* plays an important role in moral development. According to the Longinian Tradition, *sublime poetry* is meant to move the undeveloped mind from disorder to order, whereas for Shaftesbury the *philosophical sublime* is a philosophical practice to gain knowledge and cultivate true harmonious nature of the human mind.

Philocles spends two highly intense days with Theocles. In that time Philocles is introduced to all three of these practices. Perhaps significantly, the final practice that he is introduced to is the experience of the *philosophical sublime,* suggesting that Shaftesbury thinks some existing philosophical skill is required before embarking on this practice. Also significantly, it is this practice that confirms Philocles's conversion to

philosophical enthusiast. Nevertheless, it might prove enough time in the right place to be converted to the practices of enthusiastic philosophy, but perhaps not long enough to hold onto them in ordinary life. Philocles expresses his worry:

> For, as much convinced as I was and as great a convert to [Theocles's] doctrine, my danger still, I owned to him, was very great, and I foresaw that when the charm of these places and his company was ceased, I should be apt to relapse and weakly yield to that too powerful charm, the world (*Characteristics*: 332).

In response, Theocles voices the question at the heart of this worry: 'Whose judgement or opinion shall we take concerning what is good, what contrary?' (*Characteristics*: 332.) So to whom might we rightly turn to maintain and be guided by in our philosophical life? Indeed, this question might be rightly asked of Theocles: on what grounds does Philocles know or trust that Theocles is a true sage to guide him on this philosophical journey? Especially, since Philocles had only ever previously followed fashion.

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, this also formed the central worry for the Longinian Tradition; that is, what constitutes and who counts as the genuine *sublime genius* in order to know who to imitate and receive proper instruction from? In fact, the question of the proper judgement of the *true* and *false sublime* appears to be the general concern of the age. At the time there is the most grave concern over how to discern the *false sublime*, and equally it is the gravest insult be accused of peddling it. However, as will be seen in the next chapter, satire seems to provide the solution along with the insults.

Chapter Four

From the Hypsous to the Bathous:

The Problem of the False Sublime

Across the accounts of John Dennis and the Longinian Tradition, and the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, the common aim has been to describe the *philosophical sublime*. In response to the ancient Longinus's *On the Sublime,* where the *sublime effect* of irresistible transport is first and most eloquently articulated, the specific goal of these modern accounts has been to determine the proper *sublime cause* and its associated *sublime sources*. Unequivocally, they hold that the genuine cause of the *philosophical sublime* is God's divine nature, which is generally observed to be harmonious order, which is self-evident from observing the law-abiding universe. However, these accounts diverge regarding the *sublime source*, with Dennis and the Longinian Tradition focussing on poetry, and Shaftesbury focussing on physical nature. Nevertheless, they again converge with the shared concern over how to genuinely know the *true sublime,* and most importantly, not to mistake the *false sublime* for it. It is generally accepted that the *true* and *false sublime* share the same effect, that is, they both feel the same. Therefore, it requires a true judge — the *sublime genius* — to discern the *true sublime* from the *false*. However, what gives certainty to the genius's judgement?

In this chapter, I set out the problem of the *false sublime*. Basically, the problem surrounds what ensures that the *sublime genius's* judgement right and certain. While it is recognised that the difference between the

true and *false sublime* is its cause, the question remains: if not by the *sublime effect*, how does the genius know that their experience of the *philosophical sublime* is true? When considered in terms of how it is possible for the true judge to know that any particular experience of the *philosophical sublime* is true, I call this the internal problem of the *false sublime*. To address this difficulty, but mostly to explain the rarity of the *sublime genius*, some of these accounts, in particular Dennis, introduce a special capacity to experience and judge the *philosophical sublime*. However, if the majority of humans lack this special capacity for it, then the general irresistibility of the *philosophical sublime* appears undermined, and its important developmental and instructional value is denied. I call this the capacity problem. Both of these manifestations of the problem of the *false sublime* were of great concern during the early eighteenth century, because, as hinted in the previous chapters, no-one wanted to cultivate or imitate the melancholia of the false enthusiast.

At the time, the parallel of the false enthusiast in poetry, literature, and theatre is the false critic, which is someone who has the appearance of a true judge of the *philosophical sublime*, but actually peddles the *false sublime*. These false critics are the prime targets of the satirists. In particular, Alexander Pope, and fellow members of the Scriblerian Club mercilessly attacked Dennis, and others identified to be part of the Longinian Tradition on this score. The Scriblerians' clearest direct attack, on these apparent pedlars of the false sublime, is in *Peri Bathous: Or, Martinus Scriblerus his Treatise of the Art of Sinking in Poetry* (1727, 1728). Explicitly modelled on Longinus's original *Peri Hypsous*, the Scriblerian invention of Martinus Scriblerus and his ars poetica *Peri Bathous* forms its exact mirror image; for where the *Hypsous* is literally the 'height,' the *Bathous* is literally the 'depth'. Thus, like all good satire it turns the sublime into the ridiculous.

To bring the problem into focus, I first (§1) look at the Scriblerian complaint against *false critics* in full. This reconnects the discussion of the *philosophical sublime* with the political and intellectual debates over the central question: what constitutes the best moral character, our true

human nature? And how do we genuinely attain it? Then (§2) I explain the details of the problem, and the two ways (internal and capacity) that it manifests in the early eighteenth century discussion. Next (§3) I describe the eighteenth century solution to this problem. Basically it appeals to a test of raillery. The view is that poetry and knowledge of the true sublime genius will survive ridicule while the false will simply receive the biggest laughs on stage and in print. Finally (§4), I argue that despite their best efforts, in the end all these accounts fail to attain the certainty that they aspire to; specifically, they do not overcome the Pyrrhonian scepticism that they aim to thwart.

§1   The Complaint: The Dangers of the False Critic

Although John Dennis is recognised to be the first professional literary critic who established the earliest account of the sublime in Britain,[69] he tends to be better remembered as a prominent, frequent butt of the Scriblerus Club's many satirical jokes.[70] Quick to find offence, and slow to offer forgiveness, short of temper, and even shorter of finances, gruff, yet eloquent, tending to self-importance and retaliation, Dennis proved an easy target for these satirists.[71] The Scriblerus Club, who mainly met in 1714, were an informal literary group of like–minded, educated gentlemen

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[69] As I have demonstrated, Dennis offers an account of the *philosophical sublime*; however, have left it as a general theory of the sublime here because that is how he is currently recognised by historians of aesthetics.

[70] Dennis's satirical persona and his public arguments with Alexander Pope largely overshadowed Dennis's actual intellectual reputation and significance to literary criticism until the early twentieth century. For discussion of this, see: (Hooker's Introduction CW2: xlvi-lxxvii).

[71] For biographical details of Dennis, see, for example: (Paul, 1911; Tupper, 1938; Prichard, 2004).

and political–cultural satirists.[72] Central members Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Gay, John Arbuthnot, and Thomas Parnell were behind the satirical creation Martinus Scriblerus. This scribbler[73] — as Pope put it in a letter to Joseph Spence — possessed 'the character of a man of capacity enough that had dipped in every art and science, but injudiciously in each' (Rumbold, 2008). Under this guise, the Scriblerians aimed to ridicule 'all the false tastes in learning' (Rumbold, 2008). Thus, by using the age's most influential social-political tools of print (particularly, pamphlets) and theatre,[74] their satire was intended to be the public arbiter of proper intellectual and moral education as debated by the politically motivated Ancients and Moderns.

While the Scriblerians left no political target unparodied, they especially and relentless targeted the *false sublime,* and the false critics who peddled in it. In particular the Scriblerians targeted critics like Dennis, whom they charged with the serious offence being false judges of the *philosophical sublime*. Pope most actively perpetuated this Scriblerian project, and most actively targeted Dennis on these grounds, with their fierce bouts playing out in print (see for example, Hooker 1940). In *The Narrative of Dr. Robert Norris, Concerning the Strange and Deplorable Frenzy of Mr. John Dennis,* Pope satirised Dennis's literary criticism, portraying him as if he had lost his mind. Pope writes that mock–Dennis 'is indeed in very

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[72] Although only meeting for a short time, particularly in the hands of Pope, and through correspondence, the group's project of Martinus Scriblerus ran on long after, only making it into print over 10 years later. For general information on the Scriblerians, see: (Rumbold,2004-12).

[73] As quoted in the *Oxford English Dictionary* Dr Johnson described a scribbler as 'a petty author; a writer without worth' (OED). Associated with the act of (handwritten) scribbling idiosyncrasies, in the eighteenth-century a scribbler pejoratively referred to published works, particularly women authors writing in the new genre of the novel. For instance, in 1769 Clara Reeve writes 'I ought not let myself be known for a scribbler, that my sex was an insuperable objection'(quoted in Backscheider, 2005).

[74] The influence and importance of print culture in the eighteenth-century is well documented by historians, especially, in literary criticism. See for example, the text book (Alexander, 2013); Habermas analysis of the public sphere underscores many readings of the social shifts caused by print culture in the eighteenth-century (Habermas, 1989).

melancholy Circumstances, it having pleas'd God to deprive him of his Senses' (Pope, 1712, pp. 6-7). Dennis responded by colourfully criticising Pope's poetry and writing, for instance, as 'whenever he Scribbles, he is emphatically a Monkey, in his awkard servile Imitations' (CW2:104). As seen in *An Essay on Criticism,* Pope first provokes Dennis with the accusation of being a false critic.[75] In this instance, the specific charge is that he is just a stickler for the rhetorical rules of the *sublime style* and not a true judge of the nature of sublime poetry. Pope writes:

> As e'er could Dennis, of the Grecian stage,
> Concluding all were desperate sots and fools,
> Who durst depart from Aristotle's rules.
> (1711, lines 270-73)

The general complaint taken up by Pope and the Scriblerians against false critics is that they fail to have the capacity to create the *true sublime*; and thus, they lack the capacity to correctly judge it.

Significantly, the altercation between Dennis and Pope draws out the complete identification of the proper judgement and production of the *philosophical sublime* and the virtuous character. Pope draws a direct connection between Dennis's lack of capacity to judge with his apparently fierce character. Thus, the most provocative lines are those where Pope suggests that Dennis gets insensibly mad:

> But Appius [referring to Dennis] reddens at each word you speak,
> And stares, tremendous, with a threatening eye,
> Like some fierce tyrant in old tapestry.
> (Pope, 1993, p. 34-5, lines 585-87)

Nevertheless, Dennis is perhaps most ferociously caricatured for being a false critic by the Scriblerians in their play *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717)

by Gay, Pope, and Arbuthnot.[76] Here Dennis is parodied as 'the famous Sir Tremendous, the greatest critick of the age.'[77]

In the Preface to *Three Hours* the basic complaint against critics is stated, thus:

> Why on all authors then should critics fall?
> Since some have writ, and shewn no wit at all.
> (Gay, Pope, & Arbuthnot, 1717)

The direct application to Dennis appears at the beginning of Act Two, where Tremendous (a title that plays on Dennis's fondness of the word) is introduced.

> *Plotwell.*　Sir Tremendous, I rejoice at your presence; though no lady that has an antipathy, so sweats at a cat as some authors at a critick. Sir Tremendous, madam, is a Gentleman who can instruct the town to dislike what has pleased them, and to be pleased with what they disliked.
>
> *Sir Tremendous.*　Alas! what signifies one good palate when the taste of the whole town is viciated [sic]. There is not in all this Sodom of ignorance ten righteous criticks, who do not judge things backward.
>
> *Mrs Phoebe Clinkett.*　I perfectly agree with Sir Tremendous: your modern tragedies are such egregious stuff, they neither move terror nor pity.
>
> *Plotwell.*　Yes, madam, the pity of the audience on the first night, and the terror of the author for the third.[78] Sir Tremendous's plays indeed have rais'd a sublimer passion, astonishment.
>
> (Gay, Pope, & Arbuthnot, 1717, Act II)

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[76] The convoluted scenario of the Scriblerian comedy turns on the very old Dr. Fossile's marriage to a very young wife, who is pursued with farcical intrigue and disguise by two rival suitors. It is at a rehearsal of a play by Fossile's niece Phoebe Clinkett that Sir Tremendous is introduced in Act II. There he (as 'the greatest critic of the age') critiques the play. The name of the actor Plotwell is ironically suggestive that he is also a playwright of note, in actuality he is a Gentleman about town who plots well with the wives of his fellow gentlemen, in this case the new Mrs. Fossile.

[77] It is often posited that Dennis is described as 'Mr Tremendous Longinus' to emphasise his inordinate love for Longinus. I could not find such a reference in the original *Three Hours* or elsewhere.

[78] As it was standard practice in early eighteenth century theatre that the playwright was paid on the third performance, the character Plotwell's pointed remark emphasises the Tremendous Dennis's lack of theatrical success, both critical and financial.

The specific ironies of this quoted section of *Three Hours* present the main aspects of the Scriblerian complaint against false critics.

The first irony highlights the power of the false critic to instruct audiences on what they ought to 'like.' It suggests that this instructive power is so strong it can turn an audience against their own feelings, that is, 'instruct the town to dislike what has pleased them, and to be pleased with what they disliked.' This reflects the initial statement of the problem that they present in the Preface that the success of the author (the *sublime genius*) depends on the whim of the critic, not the affective experience of the work (irresistible transport). The second irony is where Tremendous says: 'what signifies one good palate when the taste of the whole town is viciated [i.e, vitiated].' On the face of it, Tremendous appears to have the 'one good palate,' that rare taste of the *sublime genius*, who has the given capacity to judge the *true sublime*; but it actually implies the opposite. Rather, that the critic's taste is confined to his idiosyncratic liking, where its rarity results from it going against the naturally shared effect, and not the genius's capacity to correctly judge the *true sublime*. Thus, the false critic is unnaturally defective. The third irony is that the relevant meaning of 'astonishment' is the shock of stupefaction rather than the desired shock of awe or wonder, Longinus's irresistible transport.[79] Being a failed playwright demonstrates that Tremendous lacks the capacity to create the *true sublime*, and thus, following the period's accepted view, lacks the capacity to be a true judge of it.

The Scriblerian complaint, then, turns on the general understanding of the rare *sublime genius's* capacity to judge the *true sublime*. This has already been seen in both the Longinian Tradition (Chapter 2, §4), and Shaftesbury (Chapter 3, §4). On this common view, it is accepted that all humans might have the natural capacity to be irresistibly transported by the *true sublime*, that is, feel the *sublime effect*. Yet only the

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[79] This picks up the obsolete meaning of *astonishment, n.*, Oxford English Dictionary: '2. Loss of sense or 'wits'; being out of one's wits or at one's wits' end; mental prostration, stupor' (OED).

rare *sublime genius* has the capacity to genuinely judge the *true sublime*, that is, know that it is the effect of the proper *sublime cause*. The reason usually given for this is that the *sublime genius* has the rare capacity to create the *philosophical sublime*, which is usually described as their *greatness of thought*. On these grounds, the Scriblerians claim that in order to correctly judge the *philosophical sublime* in poetry, or any other appropriate human artifice, the true critic must have the genius's capacity to create it. It follows that only genuine sublime poets can be true critics. As grist to this Scriblerian mill, despite Dennis's aspirations he was mostly unsuccessful as a playwright and poet.[80] Significantly, the Scriblerians' complaint against false critics simply repeats and plays upon Dennis and the Longinian Tradition's rejection of the *sublime style*.

In *Remarks on Prince Arthur*[81] Dennis employs this same strategy in his straight criticism of Richard Blackmore's popular poem. In criticising Blackmore for producing the *false sublime* Dennis makes the reciprocal claim about the genius; that is, in order to correctly create the *philosophical sublime* in poetry, the sublime poet must have the capacity to correctly judge it. Dennis suggests this when he states that:

> … in an admirable Poem Written by a very great Man, who with all that wonderful fire which is so conspicuous in him, has *all the discernment and the fine penetration*, which is *necessary* for the reflection upon the most secret motions of his own mind, and upon those of others (my emphasis, CW1: 47).

From this he goes on to charge Blackmore with lacking the 'greatness of the mind' to create the true sublime (CW1: 47). Here Dennis defines the *sublime genius* as 'the expression of a Furious Joy, or Pride, or Astonishment, or all of them caused by the conception of an extraordinary hint [i.e., the

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[80] Prichard (2004) writes that 'Dennis wrote several plays which achieved, at best, modest success'. And Hooker observes that Dennis 'wrote only one poem of any consequence, and only one play' (CW2: lvi).

[81] Full title: *Remarks on a Book Entituled, Prince Arthur An Heroick Poem. With Some General Critical Observations, and Several New Remarks Upon Virgil* (1696) (CW1: 46-144).

divine]' (CW1: 47). In turn, Dennis claims that 'Mr. Blackmore had very seldom either the hints or the motions' (CW1: 47). Recall that the same accusation was seen in Shaftesbury when he complained that, unlike Homer, the 'spurious race' of poets lacked the capacity to rightly judge the *philosophical sublime,* and hence, could not create it (*Characteristics*: 109; see Chapter 3, §1).

The main problem with false critics is that they instruct the undeveloped and unlearned character in the *false sublim*e. For the Scriblerians, the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury, indeed, it seems, the whole intellectual conversation, this poses a real danger. Across the discussion of the *philosophical sublime* it is commonly accepted and advanced that the *true sublime* is God's divine nature as immanent in the harmoniously ordered universe. As parts in this harmonious ordered universe, good humans are the ones who conform to their natural God-given order, and the height of virtue is the perfect attainment of this harmonious ordered nature. Thus, to develop human nature, that is, to become virtuous, requires instructing the vicious, dis-ordered nature in its natural harmony. On this picture, the *sublime genius* is attributed with the capacity to properly judge and produce the *philosophical sublime*. Thus, the *sublime genius* is necessarily the best and wisest character, which is evidenced by expressing the *true sublime* in poetry. In turn, truly sublime poetry produced by such a genius instructs the undeveloped character by properly moving the passions towards the naturally harmonious state, our true nature; where the passions are taken to be the main cause of unnatural imbalance in human nature. However, the false critic wrongly persuades, as per the rhetorical *sublime style*, the undeveloped character to appreciate the *false* appearance of the sublime (instead of the *true sublime*).

The danger of false critics, then, is that they actively encourage unnatural, and hence immoral, character development. The story goes that the undeveloped mind is irresistibly moved by the *philosophical sublime*. However, such a mind does not — at least not with certainty — know that the movement is the *true sublime* rather than the *false*. This is because, it

seems, unlike that of the *sublime genius,* the undeveloped mind lacks the capacity to judge. It also seems to follow that proper judgement of the *true sublime* is developed through the imitation of true judges. One method of this sort of development is by engaging with sublime poetry (literature, or theatre). That way, over time, knowledge as true judgement can be attained. But, initially, this method requires instruction from the genius — in this instance as the true sublime critic — on which are the proper sources of the *philosophical sublime* to engage with. On these grounds, critics (who are understood to be proper judges of the *true sublime*) have great power over the development of a virtuous society. False critics exhibit this power but they fail to develop the virtuous soul, promoting deviancy within society instead. This is their danger. The Scriblerians' satirical and serious attack is meant to thwart this danger by exposing false critics and undermining their influence. Similarly, serious critics aim to expose and undermine the *false sublime* in poetry (and other apparent false poets and critics).

In addition to the Scriblerians' noble aim to be the public arbiter of proper intellectual and virtuous education they are also deeply concerned with their own reputations. This is revealed by the initial phrasing of the complaint in *Three Hours,* that is, 'Why on all authors then should critics fall?' These satirists, in particular the lead Scriblerian, Pope, are also the 'authors' who are liable to 'fall' at the hands of the targeted critics. Thus, the likes of *Three Hours* and *Peri Bathous* form a fierce defence of personal reputations. This concern is directly bound up in the political and social elitism of the time. As first mentioned in Chapter 2, §1, each of the competing political elites thought themselves evidently the natural rulers, accusing their opponents of unnatural defectiveness. In fact these poets, critics, and satirists are directly politically active, with respective literary opponents falling on opposite sides of the newly formed political parties. In this instance, the Scriblerians are Tories, while Dennis (along with Shaftesbury) is a Whig. Therefore, the *sublime genius* is thought to correspond with and is used to support the party political claims on which

group constitutes the right political rulers. The changing role of the Church has similar religious implications, where the *sublime genius* is thought to have certain claims on and be representative of True Religion (understood in relation to a naturalised God). As such, the dangers of the *false sublime*, and the worry of being accused of peddling it, are directly connected to this broader political–social context.

§2   The Problem: Knowing the True Sublime From the False

It is now clear that the danger of false critics is that they peddle in the *false sublime*, leading the undeveloped character into vicious disorder. The difficulty for the undeveloped character is that the *true* and *false sublime* share the same affect, that is, they both feel the same. Therefore, it requires a true judge — the *sublime genius* — to know the *true sublime* from the *false*. In turn, the *sublime genius* can instruct the undeveloped character; that is, be rightly moved from unnatural disorder towards natural order. Nevertheless, considering that these true judges also cannot appeal to the *sublime effect*, what makes it possible for them to genuinely know. This raises the initial question: what makes the *sublime genius's* judgement right? How does the sublime genius really know the *true sublime* from the *false*? There are two ways to think about these questions. One way is in terms of how the true judge can know for themselves that their experience of the *philosophical sublime* is true. I call this the internal problem of the *false sublime* — that is, *my* experience, *internal to me*. The other way is in terms of how we (including the undeveloped character) can identify the *sublime genius*. Because of the rarity of the genius, it is often advanced that they are distinguished by a special capacity for the *philosophical sublime*. However, as will be seen, this raises what I call the capacity problem, where describing the *sublime genius* in terms of a special capacity denies the instructive value

of the *true sublime*.

The Internal Problem

The internal problem is a recognised worry across early eighteenth century accounts. Shaftesbury acknowledges it in *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm,* where he first attempts to realign the term enthusiasm with its ancient meaning of true divine inspiration, while distancing it from the false modern manifestations as melancholia. In *A Letter, Section 7,* Shaftesbury describes the internal problem of the *philosophical sublime* in terms of true and false enthusiasm. He writes, at length:

> The only thing, my Lord, I would infer from all this is that enthusiasm is wonderfully powerful and extensive, that it is a matter of nice judgement and the hardest thing in the world to know fully and distinctly since even atheism is not exempt from it. For, as some have well remarked, there have been enthusiastical atheists. Nor can divine inspiration, by its outward marks, be easily distinguished from it. For inspiration is a real feeling of the Divine Presence and enthusiasm a false one. But the passion they raise is much alike. For when the mind is taken up in vision and fixes its view either on any real object or mere spectre of divinity, when it sees, or thinks it sees, anything prodigious and more than human, its horror, delight, confusion, fear, admiration or whatever passion belongs to it or is uppermost on this occasion, will have something vast, 'immane'[82] and (as painters say) beyond life. And this is what gave occasion to the name of fanaticism, as it was used by the ancients in its original sense, for an apparition transporting the mind (*Characteristics*: 27).

All the main elements of the problem appear in this passage. Here, Shaftesbury alerts us to the danger of false enthusiasm, which he refers to as just 'enthusiasm.' He takes its effect, a kind of madness, to be 'powerful and extensive'; so much so that even 'atheists' cannot escape this primarily religious malaise. Marking the extent of the danger of the false, he points out that false enthusiasm cannot be distinguished by either its 'outward marks' or internally felt enthusiastic 'passion.' The phrase 'outward marks'

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[82] These are Shaftesbury's own scare quotes. From the Oxford English Dictionary, *immane*, adj. '2. Of immense size or strength; huge, vast, enormous.' (OED)

takes the observer's point of view, where the false enthusiast looks the same as the true from the outside; the phrase 'the passion they raise is much alike' expresses the understanding that the true and false share the same affect, that is, they both feel the same in experience. In contrast to the false, Shaftesbury defines true enthusiasm — which he refers to here as 'inspiration' — as 'a real feeling of the Divine Presence,' which he connects with 'its original sense, for an apparition[83] transporting the mind.' Thus, he makes the usual distinction between the true and false cause with 'real object or mere spectre of divinity.' The problem is whether or not the mind actually 'sees, or [just] thinks it sees' the divine, because in both cases it raises the (same) 'passion that belongs to it,' which in both cases leads to imagining it to be something 'beyond life,' whether or not it is actually caused by the divine. For this reason, distinguishing the *true* from the *false sublime* via its attendant passion enthusiasm is, as Shaftesbury puts it, 'the hardest thing in the world to know fully and distinctly.'

In *A Letter,* Shaftesbury offers the shape of his solution to the internal problem. On his description, the crux of the problem is the imaginative step from the general feeling (of transport) to creating the right image of the particular cause of an experience (that is, knowing if it is God's divine nature or merely the appearance of it). In the passage that immediately follows the one quoted above, he associates 'divine enthusiasm' with the 'sublime in human passions' (*Characteristics*: 27). As set out in Chapter 3 §3, Shaftesbury's divine, or 'noble enthusiasm' (*Characteristics*: 28) is the passion felt in the harmonious state of the *philosophical sublime*. He posits that all humans have the basic general capacity to experience the *true sublime,* writing that 'almost all of us know something of this principle' (*Characteristics*: 28). In order to 'avoid delusion' — where we imagine the incorrect cause of the enthusiastic feeling — this capacity requires development (*Characteristics*: 28). He introduces his principle of moral education (see also Chapter 3 §2-3). He

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[83] That is, divine poetic muses (*Characteristics*: 4).

writes:

> For 'to judge the spirits whether they are of God', we must antecedently 'judge our own Spirit', whether it be of reason and sound sense, whether it be fit to judge…This is the first knowledge and previous judgement: 'To understand ourselves and know what spirit we are of.' Afterwards we may judge the spirit in others (*Characteristics*: 28, see also my Chapter 3 §3).

Thus, he considers that this philosophical practice leads us to properly and certainly distinguish both the 'outward marks' and the internally felt enthusiastic 'passions' of the *true sublime* from the *false*.

The Capacity Problem

While Shaftesbury's solution accounts for the *sublime genius*'s capacity to properly experience and judge the *true sublime*, it does not appear to explain why geniuses are evidently so rare. Specifically, he does not clearly address why certain humans appear to be born with the capacity (potentially fully formed) to judge and produce the *philosophical sublime*. And conversely why the majority of human natures seemingly fail to develop any capacity for it at all. As seen across the various discussions of nature and art, particularly within the Longinian Tradition, the rarity of the *sublime genius* forms a focal point of the debate. This capacity problem is captured by the question: if all humans have the capacity to be irresistibly transported by the *philosophical sublime*, why do only some humans have the capacity to truly judge it? Although Shaftesbury is keenly aware of these questions regarding the general population and his account might be mined for the answers, they are just not immediately obvious. The main reason for this in Shaftesbury, and similarly across these early eighteenth century accounts, is that these accounts focus on describing the *sublime genius's* nature. Within the scope of such descriptions of the genius these accounts appear more consistent. The problem is when they are generalised across all human natures. In contrast, Dennis attempts to address the problem directly and explain the rarity of the *sublime genius*. To do so, he introduces a special capacity for experiencing the *true sublime* in order to correctly

judge it. (Dennis's approach also offers an alternative solution to the internal problem, where in virtue of their given nature the *sublime genius* just has the natural capacity to rightly judge the *true sublime*.)

Dennis falls foul of the capacity problem by appealing to a special capacity for enthusiasm. To see how he develops this view, I summarise his account from Chapter 2 §3, as follows: In virtue of our God-given human nature, all humans have the natural capacity to feel both kinds of the passions, that is, vulgar and enthusiastic; but since all humans are, to some extent, in a state of vicious imbalance, our proper excitement of the passions requires development. Thus, poetry that is designed to instruct by the appropriate excitement of the passions best develops the genuine virtuous character. Significantly, the most instructive poetry is that which best moves the fallen nature from irregularity to harmony, from disorder to order. As it is the most passionate, sublime poetry is meant to be the most instructive. Specifically, it is meant to powerfully move, and hence, instruct, by properly exciting enthusiasm. However, Dennis asserts that there is a difference between the general human capacity to feel the vulgar passion and the *sublime genius's* special capacity to feel enthusiasm.

Dennis first makes the claim that there are different capacities to feel vulgar and enthusiastic passions in the following passage from *The Grounds*:

> Thus there are two sorts of Passions to be rais'd in Poetry, the Vulgar and the Enthusiastick ; to which last, the Vulgar is preferable, because all Men are capable of being moved by the Vulgar, and a Poet writes to all : But the Enthusiastick are more subtle, and thousands have no feeling and no notion of them. But where the Vulgar cannot be moved in great degree, there Enthusiastick are to be rais'd. Therefore in those parts of Epick Poetry, where the Poet speaks himself, or the Eldest of Muses for him, the Enthusiastick passions are to prevail, as likewise in the Great Ode. And the Vulgar Passions are to prevail in those parts of the Epick and Dramatick Poem, where the poet introduced Persons hold Conversation together. And perhaps this might be one Reason, for which Aristotle might prefer Tragedy to Epick Poetry, because the Vulgar Passions prevail more in it, and are more violently mov'd in it ; and therefore Tragedy must necessarily both please,

and instruct more generally than Epick Poetry. We shall then treat of the Vulgar Passions when we come to speak of Tragedy, in which Poem they ought most to prevail : we shall then more particularly shew the surest and most powerful ways of raising Compassion and Terror, which are the true Tragical Passions. (CW1: 339)

In this passage he claims that all humans have a common capacity to feel the vulgar passions; yet we do not generally have one for enthusiasm.

Dennis implies that a different or special capacity is required to feel enthusiasm when he writes that it is 'more subtle, and thousands have no feeling and no notion of it.' The nature of this difference in capacity is further described in the following passage:

> For Men are mov'd for two Reasons, either because they have weak Minds and Souls, that are capable of being mov'd by little Objects, and consequently by little and ordinary Ideas ; or because they have Greatness of Soul and Capacity, to discern and feel the great ones : for the Enthusiastick Passions being caus'd by the Ideas, it follows, that the more the Soul is capable of receiving Ideas whose Objects are truly great and wonderful, the greater will the Enthusiasm be that is caus'd by those Ideas. From whence it follows, the greater the Soul is, and the larger the Capacity, the more will it be mov'd by religious Ideas ; which are not only great and wonderful, but which almost alone are great and wonderful to a great and wise Man ; and never fail to move very strongly, unless it is for want of due Reflection, or want of Capacity in the Subject. (CW: 340)

Clearly, Dennis considers that the human capacity to feel enthusiasm depends on a certain 'greatness of soul and capacity, to discern and feel the great ones.'

Dennis's claim, then, is that according to the *sublime genius's* greatness of soul they have a special capacity to experience and create the *philosophical sublime*; specifically, the capacity to rightly feel enthusiasm. In contrast, all other human minds have only the ordinary capacity for the vulgar passions. He appears generally motivated to make this distinction for two now familiar political reasons. He wishes to reinstate a positive, politically acceptable, sense of enthusiasm, while distancing it from religious zealotry and political radicalisation. He also wants to preserve the separation between the minority aristocratic elite and the common masses, because of the assumed social order that this hierarchy is meant to

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maintain. On this picture, the social elite are identified with the rare geniuses of the sublime poets and critics, the men of letters, whereas the common masses correspond with general readers and audiences.[84] This is further correlated with God-given capacities; that is, the rare genius has the special capacity for enthusiasm, whereas the majority have the ordinary capacity for the vulgar passions. The problem remains that if the majority of humans lack the capacity for enthusiasm, the feeling for the proper passion of the *philosophical sublime*, then the general irresistible *sublime effect* appears to be undermined. Moreover, the important developmental or instructional value of sublime poetry is denied because those who require it cannot feel it.

By making a distinction between the capacities for the vulgar passions and enthusiasm, however, Dennis undermines the instructive value of sublime poetry, making it largely ineffectual or redundant. It becomes redundant because those rare few geniuses who naturally possess the special capacity for enthusiasm already have a developed virtuous character, which requires no instruction. Conversely, for the common majority havie no special capacity, or way of acquiring it, sublime poetry is completely ineffectual as they can never feel the enthusiasm in sublime poetry to be moved by it. For the majority, they only have the capacity for the vulgar passions, and thus, only poetry that excites the vulgar can instruct the irregular character. So Dennis is going against his central claim that the greatest, most passionate, sublime poetry best reforms the irregular or disordered nature. As a result he creates a tension between what the *philosophical sublime* is — that is, the height of nature expressed in the greatest poetry, and what the *philosophical sublime* is meant to do — that is, to instruct and reform character.

To help Dennis escape the capacity problem, a tempting alternative reading of his two passages (quoted above) is that the difference in

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[84] Despite hints of social equality and religious tolerance, Dennis's critical theory appears to support an exclusive intellectual community that directly maintains the established institutions of a relatively elite public sphere. For a further discussion of this, see (Morillo, 2000).

capacity occurs between producing and feeling the *philosophical sublime*. On this reading, the rare *sublime genius* has the special given capacity to create the greatest, sublime poetry, while the common majority are generally, perhaps irresistibly, affected and instructed by these geniuses' sublime poetry. It suggests that all humans have the God-given capacity to feel all of the passions, including enthusiasm, whereas only the genius has the capacity to create the *philosophical sublime* that rightly elicits enthusiasm. This appears to fit well with the associated Longinian Tradition. But against this reading, Dennis's account does not explicitly assert the mass effect of sublime poetry; yet, he explicitly limits the feeling for enthusiasm while asserting the mass feeling for the vulgar passions. A better fit for Dennis seems to be that the greatest poetry need not generally instruct (that is, the greatest number of souls); rather it may simply have the greatest instructive effect on certain souls in the development of the *sublime genius*. He may accept that in the course of the genius's character development their ordinary capacity is refined into the special capacity to feel enthusiasm and express the *philosophical sublime*.[85] But, because this process still requires developing the ordinary capacity, exciting the vulgar passions remains the most effective initial instruction for the undeveloped character.

A final alternative is that Dennis might be claiming that the greatest developmental step occurs between merely attaining the basic special capacity to feel enthusiasm and attaining the complete harmony of the faculties — the perfect *sublime state*. In this way, sublime poetry forms the most significant point of instruction. But Dennis clearly correlates the greatness of the capacity to feel enthusiasm with the extent of passionate movement: that is, the greatest souls are the most moved by enthusiasm precisely because of their attained greatness. The capacity for the *philosophical sublime*, then, marks the height or completion of character development. But again this leaves the instructive value of sublime poetry

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[85] Dennis implies a version of Aristotelian habituation for moral development. A difficulty for Dennis's adoption of *habitus* is seen in (Delehanty, 2007).

largely ineffectual or redundant. This is because in this case, the sublime poetry excites the greatest passion in the virtuous character; however, only once that character has attained the height of virtue. As such, it fails to excite, or instruct, the irregular, undeveloped character. Thus, maintaining the tension with Dennis's claim that all poetry is to morally instruct, and that sublime poetry is the most instructive. As a result, Dennis cannot escape the capacity problem. And, looking beyond the public name calling and heated printed exchanges, this is the serious problem picked up by Pope and the Scriblerians in *Peri Bathous*.

Peri Bathous*: Pope's Complaint Against the Special Capacity for the Philosophical Sublime*

Peri Bathous, which Scriblerus translates as 'The Profound,' is foremost a political and cultural satire. Nevertheless, with caution, it can be read as an inversion of the Scriblerian's serious view on poetry and literary criticism. Although a collaboration, it is primarily fashioned on and representative of Pope's view as developed by him in his non-satirical works, such as, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) and *An Essay on Man* (1733-34).[86] Primarily, *Peri Bathous* plays upon the capacity problem. In it, Pope accuses Dennis, and his fellow false critics, of illicitly appealing to a special capacity for the *philosophical sublime*. The special capacity is parodied in Scriblerus's 'first principle of the Profound' in poetry, which is described as to:

> … studiously detest, and turn his head from all ideas, ways, and workings of the pestilent foe to wit and destroyer of fine figures, which is known by the name common sense. His business must be to contract the gout de travers; and to acquire a most happy, uncommon, unaccountable way of thinking. (Original emphasis, PB: 200-1)

Moreover, according to Scriblerus the 'profound' end of poetry is 'tranquillity of mind,' that is, the complete dulling of the passions, and where passions are raised they must be from 'low-life' (PB: 213).

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[86] E. L. Steeves argues that it is reasonable to read *Peri Bathous* as primarily Pope's view in her introduction to her edited volume, (Steeves, 1952, p. xi-lxix).

Scriblerus considers that the mastery of this profound mediocrity or poetic descent is best achieved by unnatural imitation. Scriblerus gives two sorts of imitation: 'the first is when we force to our own purposes the thoughts of others; the second consists in copying the imperfections or blemishes of celebrated authors' (PB: 213). But unnatural imitation is also generally achieved by the surprising (mis-)matching of the marvellous and the improbably low, or simply base vulgarity (PB: 201, 207). One such unnatural pairing Scriblerus gives is 'a footman speaking like a philosopher' (PB: 201). Nevertheless, the most unnatural imitation is of low metaphors for God's divine nature (PB: 203-5).

Taking all humans to commonly have the God-given capacity for the *philosophical sublime*, the Scriblerians are most scathing of theories, and the associated false critics, that appeal to anything that falls outside of that common capacity. If an account does make such an appeal then the resulting appearance of the sublime collapses into its anti-thesis, the Profound (*false sublime*). This is implied by Scriblerus when he writes:

> The Sublime of nature is the sky, the sun, moon, stars, etc., the Profound of nature is gold, pearls, precious stones, and the treasures of the deep, which are inestimable as unknown. But all that lies between these, as corn, flowers, fruits, animals, and things for the mere use of man, are of mean price, and so common as not to be esteemed by the curious: it being certain, that any thing, of which we know the true use, cannot be invaluable: which affords a solution, why common sense hath either been totally despised, or held in small repute, by the greatest modern critics and authors (PB: 200).

On the Scriblerian view, Dennis's special capacity for enthusiasm falls outside of the common human capacity for the sublime. This is because it does not properly excite what is common to all human nature, and thus descends into Scriblerus's Profound.

According to Pope's serious view, which is representative of the Scriblerians, sublime poetry must imitate true nature and is the highest

expression of genuine human nature.[87] It is produced by the *natural sublime* genius who has the imaginative capacity to intuit this nature. These true expressions of nature must conform to the common human capacity to experience nature. This assumes that in virtue of our given human nature, *all* humans have the capacity to feel the sensible world in a common way. For Pope, then, the imitated nature in poetry is limited to and regulated by what is common to all natures, which denies any appeal to uncommon, unnatural idiosyncrasy of individuals. So the sublime poet not only imaginatively intuits nature but can rightly judge which intuited aspects are common to all human natures. The greatest, sublime poetry most vividly and effectively expresses true common nature. In turn, the reader is immediately struck by this expression of nature, and is rightly moved by the poetic realisation of the genuine passions of the soul. Thus, Pope holds that the *philosophical sublime* is the height of common God-given human nature, and the sublime poet is the one who can most clearly express it.

Dennis, then, receives the harshest Scriblerian charge of peddling in the peculiarities or idiosyncrasies of certain natures, specifically those of the false critic, rather than the refined common nature of the best and wisest characters. On the Scriblerian account, the rare genius has a fully developed capacity for the *philosophical sublime* common to all human nature, making them the true judge and measure of good taste. Moreover, the *philosophical sublime* is the greatest expression of true human nature, which is regulated by what is known to be common to all humans. On these terms, the tension in Dennis is generalised from instruction to poetic appreciation, making it between what the *philosophical sublime* is and who rightly appreciates it (the true judge). As such, Dennis's *philosophical sublime* becomes the unnatural expression of peculiar and idiosyncratic natures, unregulated by common sense, and beneath good taste. Nevertheless, despite their apparent differences, Pope's view here matches

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[87] These features of Pope's view that are summarised in this paragraph appear explicitly and implicitly throughout his critical works; see especially *An Essay Concerning Criticism* (Alexander Pope, 1993, pp. 19-24). For an in-depth discussion of Pope's understanding of and relation to 'nature' see: (Tillotson, 1958).

Dennis's account of poetry in a number of ways.[88] Like Dennis, Pope considers poetry to be the proper imitation of ordered or regular God-given nature; it correctly excites the passions, and reflects moral refinement. However, unlike Dennis, Pope denies any special capacity for the *philosophical sublime,* say, some 'sublime sense.' Problematically, though, Pope's own account of sublime poetry also suffers a similar charge and collapse into Scriblerus's *bathous*.

Although placing common nature at the centre of his account, Pope appears to hold that the true judgement of nature in poetry requires a specially developed capacity, that is, one that can rightly experience our true nature (PB: 198). He further implies that the majority of us lack such a capacity, especially those he mocks as having pretensions to the sublime. Pope does not appear to explain why only certain natures have this (reintroduced) special capacity for the sublime. Instead, he seems to be simply replacing his satirised opponent with his own idiosyncratic intellectual community, namely the Scriblerians, as the true judge. Unfortunately, then, they too fall for the capacity problem. However, this might be because their greater concern, as reflected in their complaint against false critics, recasts the capacity problem as: how does the undeveloped character have the capacity to judge the true critic from the false? For the Scriblerians the solution is satire, which *Peri Bathous* exemplifies. Their solution seems to be that satirical mockery and parody reveals the false sublime for what it really is. Pertinently, Shaftesbury sets out this appeal to 'raillery.'

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[88] For further discussion of the political motivations for claiming intellectual and literary differences between the Whig Dennis and Tory Pope, see (Gerrard, 2005).

§3 Shaftesbury's Solution: 'in commendation of raillery'

In early eighteenth century Britain all the well-established canons of scholastic liberal arts learning come into question, put into doubt by the Ancients and Moderns debate. Without the typical consensus over, and associated certainty of, what counts as the canonical sources of a proper education, it raises the general worry of whom to rightly study in order to cultivate our true nature, our virtuous character. In line with these concerns, the *philosophical sublime's* capacity problem is recast as: how does the undeveloped character (that is, the vast majority of humans) develop the capacity to judge the *true sublime* from the *false*? The generally accepted developmental story appeals to imitation of the *sublime genius* and their works. In practical terms, because the undeveloped character lacks the capacity to judge for themselves, they require instruction from the *sublime genius*, a true judge, on what, indeed whom, to imitate. This is instead of, for instance, in the literary critical terms of the Longinian Tradition, merely following the ancient rules of rhetoric. Hence, the new-found power and the danger of the critic as such an instructor on whom to imitate. In practice, then, the question becomes: how does the undeveloped character judge the true critic from the false?

The solution to all these problems according to Pope and the Scriblerians is satire. Recall that Pope expressed their aim to be to ridicule 'all the false tastes in learning' (Rumbold, 2008). They are using satire to act as the public arbiter of proper intellectual and moral education. It is meant to work by making the pedlars of the *false sublime*, and more broadly moral and political ills, look ridiculous in order to expose their falsehoods and ills. It is advanced as an antidote to the false persuasion, which is associated with the pompous and overwrought *sublime style*. However, the problem with this approach as it stands is that the Scriblerians, and satirists in general, do not appear any more qualified to arbitrate than their

satirised targets. As just seen immediately above, instead of being the measure of common nature, Pope and the Scriblerians ultimately appeal to a special capacity to judge, giving them no grounds to distinguish between theirs, and any other idiosyncratic view. It boils down to mere partisan preference. However, in *Sensus Communis*, Shaftesbury offer a more robust version of this argument when he speaks 'in commendation of raillery' (*Characteristics*: 29). He makes this appeal to good-humoured ridicule to counter the claims of false enthusiasm and knowledge.

Shaftesbury puts forward the general principle of raillery to be free to make indiscriminate fun of all thinkers and thought. He argues:

> For that which can be shown only in a certain light is questionable. Truth, it is supposed, may bear all lights, and one of those principal lights, or natural mediums, by which things are to be viewed, in order for a thorough recognition, is ridicule itself, or that manner of proof by which we discern whatever is liable to just raillery in any subject. So much, at least, is allowed by all who at any time appeal to this criterion. The gravest gentlemen, even the gravest subjects, are supposed to acknowledge this and can have no right, it is thought, to deny others the freedom of this appeal, while they are free to censure like other men and in their gravest argument make no scruple to ask, 'Is it not ridiculous?' (*Characteristics*: 30)

Shaftesbury warns against certain types of mean false wits, and concludes that even this can be overcome because 'wit is its own remedy' (*Characteristics*: 31). Thus, nothing is beyond being tested by his principle. He says that: 'The only danger is laying the embargo on wit, raillery, ridicule and good humour' (*Characteristics*: 31).

On Shaftesbury's view, the sublime genius as both true judge and producer of the *philosophical sublime*, and their respective ideas, will survive all ridicule. These are his 'gravest gentlemen, even the gravest subjects,' which are the 'truth' that 'may bear all lights' including the light that results from being ridiculed. As a result, this ridicule illuminates the true characters and ideas for *all to see*. Thus, the undeveloped character has access to whom to rightly imitate, and in turn, is able to develop their capacity to judge the *true sublime*. Shaftesbury's principle is a stronger

version of the test of time.[89] In addition to just outlasting fashion, it argues that the genuinely true, beautiful, and good, will withstand ongoing raillery. It also has the advantage of testing the current fashion without the wait required for a true test of time. Now, like the test of time, the principle of raillery does give us some reason to think that its target might be an instance of the *true* or *false sublime*. However, it is only an indicator of this and cannot ground its truth with the certainty that this principle aspires to and indeed requires. Thus, with the period having raised doubt in all the sources of education, the principle of raillery cannot, at least not on its own, identify with certainty the true sources of the *philosophical sublime*.

§4 The Pyrrhonian Reply: an Uncertain Conclusion

A summary of the overall picture of the early eighteenth century debate: Pope and the Scriblerians complain that the false critic peddles in the *false sublime*, which holds the real danger of encouraging unnatural, and hence, immoral, disorder of character. This complaint brings to light the general problem that arises from the *true* and *false sublime* having the same effect of irresistible transport. Cast as the internal problem, the question is: if not by the sublime effect, then how do I know — correctly judge — that my experience of the *philosophical sublime* is true? Considering that Dennis and the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury, even Pope and the Scriblerians, discuss the early eighteenth century *philosophical sublime* almost entirely in terms of the *sublime genius*, this question becomes: what makes the *sublime genius's* judgement true? The generally accepted answer is that the *sublime*

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[89] Perhaps the best known appeal to the test of time in aesthetic theory is in Hume's *The Standard of Taste* (1757/77). For a discussion of the role of the test of time in Hume see (Levinson, 2002).

genius has the right sort of fully developed character, which is regularly described as having the greatness of thought — equivalently, Dennis's 'greatness of soul' — to be a true judge, a true critic. This follows from, for instance, Shaftesbury's claim that the natural human capacity to genuinely experience the *philosophical sublime* can be developed in order to correctly judge the *true sublime* from the *false*. However, by making the true judges simply the result of developing our general capacity to be moved by the *philosophical sublime*, it is unclear why the genius is so rare.

The evident rarity of the *sublime genius* introduces the capacity problem, which asks: if all humans have the capacity to be irresistibly transported by the *philosophical sublime*, then why is the capacity to truly judge it so rare (and indeed, so variable)? To explain this, Dennis appeals to a special capacity for the *philosophical sublime*. Specifically, he posits that the *sublime genius* has a special capacity to feel enthusiasm, whereas the majority of human natures only have the capacity to feel the vulgar passions. Yet, on every permutation of his claim, it remains in tension with sublime poetry's important purpose, to instruct the dis-ordered character. Like the Longinian Tradition in general, Dennis holds that sublime poetry, in virtue of being the greatest and most passionate, is the most instructive of the dis-ordered character. Nevertheless, his view has the problematic outcome that if the majority of human characters lack the capacity to feel the *philosophical sublime's* attendant passion enthusiasm then they lack the capacity to be instructed by experience of the *true sublime*. Moreover, as satirised in *Peri Bathous*, Dennis's special capacity is prone to just picking out the peculiarities or idiosyncrasies of individual characters rather than the truly great harmonious soul of the *sublime genius*. Thus, Dennis fails to answer the capacity problem. Unfortunately, Pope and the Scriblerians posit that the *sublime genius* is the special, uncommon height of common nature, a response which also fails in the same way.

Yet, in keeping with their complaint against false critics, the Scriblerians are most concerned with the practicalities of how to actually properly cultivate the undeveloped character; that is, the practice of

transforming it from unnatural disorder to natural order. This recasts the capacity problem as: how does the undeveloped character (that is, the vast majority of humans) develop the capacity to judge the *true sublime* from the *false*? On the general developmental story, this comes through the proper imitation of the *sublime genius,* which initially requires the undeveloped character to receive instruction on what, indeed whom, to imitate. In the context of the Ancients and Moderns the canonical works of liberal education are contested; and if all sources of knowledge are put in doubt, then whom to rightly imitate? As such, the specific question of practical capacity becomes: how does the undeveloped character have the capacity to judge the true genius from the false? The answer that the Scriblerians enact, and that Shaftesbury argues for, is the freedom to make indiscriminate fun of them. On this view, the *sublime genius* as true critic, and their respective ideas, will survive all ridicule and raillery; in other words, the genuinely true, beautiful, and good, will stand the test of time (immediate and future).

Nevertheless, on all of these variations of the problem of judging the *true sublime* from the *false,* the difficulty remains the same. If no-one can distinguish the feeling of the *true* and *false sublime,* how do we ever come to correctly know the difference? The gap remains between the feeling of the *sublime effect,* and knowledge of its true cause. The generally accepted early eighteenth century answer is that the *sublime genius* has the greatness of thought to know the difference; and in turn, they can instruct the undeveloped majority in this knowledge. However, all the attempts to explain the grounds for the genius having such knowledge appeal to a special or uncommon capacity to rightly experience, judge and produce the *philosophical sublime*. But again, due to its rarity the true capacity remains indistinguishable from its appearance in the individual eccentric. Raillery might help reveal the likelihood of, say, a poem (and its poet) to endure, but like all versions of the argument for the test of time, ultimately it only demonstrates an enduring consensus to consider it is sublime poetry rather than identifying and grounding its true cause.

It seems, then, on this early eighteenth century picture that the only resolution, the best we humans can do, is to suspend our judgement of the *true sublime*. Indeed, we end up being resigned to fashion and Pyrrhonism, that is, Philocles's original moderate scepticism from which he is meant to be converted in *The Moralists*. The practical scepticism of the Pyrrhonist is basically that judgement is suspended where there are no grounds to discern or arbitrate between two opposites (Annas & Barnes, 1985, pp. 24-25). Thus, in practical terms for the *philosophical sublime*, upon experiencing any enthusiastic feeling everyone must suspend judgement on whether or not it is the *true sublime*, and indeed, moderate one's passions altogether regarding human knowledge. Although scepticism plays an important role throughout this period, Pyrrhonism is typically rejected and it is often applied as a pejorative, as exemplified in *The Moralists*.[90] Therefore, the Longinian Tradition, Shaftesbury, and the Scriblerians would want to avoid such a resolution at all costs. Not least because it would mean that the central political and intellectual question of what constitutes and how to attain the best moral character becomes unanswerable. And worst of all, none of them can lay claim to being the best and wisest characters.

Dennis's personality may have guaranteed his place as a prominent satirical target of Pope and the Scriblerians, yet, the implications of his theory of the *philosophical sublime* reinforced it. The tension seen in Dennis's account between the generally irresistible *sublime effect* and the proper judgement and production of the *true sublime* represents the serious intellectual business of the early eighteenth century. At the time sublime poetry is identified with the virtuous character of the poet, and the *sublime genius* is taken to be both true judge and producer of the *philosophical*

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[90] Richard Popkin has famously described in *The History of Scepticism* (1960) the sixteenth-century revival Pyrrhonism as provoking a 'Pyrrhonian crisis'. The accuracy and extent of this claim has been much debated since; nevertheless, it is clear that the accounts I am dealing with are concerned with certainty in a way that being called a Pyrrhonian would have been an insult.

sublime, and being accused of peddling in the *false sublime* is a real attack on virtue. Indeed, any theory that amounted to there being only idiosyncratic preference was fervently denied. Thus, being charged with idiosyncrasy and the *false sublime* proved clear provocation for the ferocious printed exchanges of 'that Tremendous Mr Dennis' and 'that Monkey Mr Pope.' Moreover, such accusations had actual political consequences; indeed, politics is at the forefront of these accounts, with a pressing need to be on the ruling side. So despite Dennis and Pope actually endorsing largely similar accounts of the *sublime genius*, they are blinded to this in the fight to promote and defend their own opposing intellectual, political, and religious views.

Significantly, then, the real point of divergence on these early eighteenth century accounts — indeed, the main point of contention — is over who they think genuinely possesses the special capacity for the *true sublime*. For instance, both Dennis and Pope believe that their own respective intellectual elite communities are the true possessors of it. And their fierce exchanges are defending their elite's claim on advancing the correct moral and political opinion in early eighteenth century England. However, as the Pyrrhonian response indicates, the tension between experience of and judgement on the *philosophical sublime* cannot be resolved. If Dennis and the Longinian Tradition, Pope and the Scriblerians, along with Shaftesbury cannot (or do not) ground their accounts of the *philosophical sublime* with full certainty, how can anyone ever correctly judge the *true sublime* at all? It seems it might still all boil down to fashion and idiosyncratic preference.

Postscript

From the Truly Perfect to the True Original: Shifts in the Eighteenth Century Concept of Genius

In this thesis, my aim has been to identify and discuss the philosophical conception of the sublime that arises out of the important and influential early eighteenth century discussion in English of the ancient Greek rhetorical text Longinus's *On the Sublime*. I demonstrated that the historians of aesthetics' conventional approach — which aims to isolate the aesthetic as a distinct, autonomous kind — fails to fully capture the philosophical role and substance of historical accounts of concepts now claimed by the field of aesthetics. Instead, I employed my alternative history of philosophy approach to reveal the *philosophical sublime* in John Dennis and the Longinian Tradition, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, and the satirical yet serious criticism of Alexander Pope and the Scriblerians. To achieve this, I have located these accounts in relation to the questions and worries that they were originally designed to address and the philosophical role that they were meant to play. In particular, it was found that these accounts' understanding of the nature and cultivation of the *sublime genius* provides an answer to the common political and intellectual question of the time, that is: what constitutes the best moral character, our true human nature? And how do we genuinely attain it? However, evident from my discussion, the concept of genius described, and debated, by Dennis,

Shaftesbury, Pope, and their immediate contemporaries, appears strikingly unfamiliar.

On the early eighteenth century view, the *sublime genius* attains, imitates and expresses, the height of genuine human nature. These accounts describe the genius as the truly perfect, and argue that the genius possesses the given capacity to both produce and judge the *philosophical sublime*. This, perhaps unexpectedly, dissolves any distinction between the true genius (producer) and the true critic (judge). In contrast to this eighteenth century conception, our current, everyday notion of genius centres on originality. We generally hold that the genius's work is (indeed, the genius is) a true original. As such, theories of genius in contemporary philosophical aesthetics centre on identifying and explaining the nature of the genius's originality of thought and creation. Significantly, this is distinct from the practice, skill or general capacity for judging the aesthetic value of artworks. Consistent with the picture I described in Chapter 1, historians of aesthetics currently employ the conventional approach to the history of the concept of genius. On this approach, the guiding criterion for determining the relevance of historical accounts is originality, and once more, Kant's account is identified as the standard upon which the eighteenth century philosophical accounts are measured. It is my purpose in this postscript to very briefly draw out the significant conceptual differences between the early eighteenth century understanding of the *sublime genius* and the later eighteenth century accounts of artistic genius exemplified by Kant.

Here I give just the briefest highlights of the eighteenth century shift in the concept of genius. I trace the picture back through time from Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) via his recognised source of influence Alexander Gerard (1728–1795) to Shaftesbury and Dennis. Then I set out the common salient features of the artistic genius as a true original, as seen in Kant and Gerard. These accounts of the artistic genius will be contrasted with Shaftesbury and Dennis's earlier *sublime genius*, which I describe in this instance defined by the truly perfect. Here, I focus on the

nature of the genius's capacity to produce great art. For the later eighteenth century proponents of artistic genius it is the capacity to produce something genuinely new; whereas for the earlier proponents of *sublime genius* it is the capacity to perfectly imitate true human nature. Although I offer no definitive explanation of this shift in saliency from perfection to originality, like Peter Kivy I hold that Joseph Addison's account of novelty as an aesthetic category forms the turning point.

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* Kant initially defines *artistic genius* in two related ways. He writes:

> **Genius** is the talent (natural gift) that gives the rule to art. Since the talent, as an inborn productive faculty of the artist, itself belongs to nature, this could also be expressed thus: **Genius** is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) **through which** nature gives the rule to art (5:307, Kant, 2000, p. 186) (original emphasis in quoted edition).

The important features of these two definitions is that, firstly, artistic genius is a given talent or predisposition. Like the earlier accounts that I have already discussed, particularly Dennis's, Kant is appealing to a special capacity to explain both the rarity and apparent given nature of the artistic genius. Secondly, within Kant's aesthetic theory the genius has the particular capacity to naturally (that is, spontaneously) produce or create the certain free play of the imagination that, on his account, normally occurs in the mind as a result of an aesthetic experience. In this way, he claims that while the aesthetic, primarily beauty, does not fall under a determinate concept (that is, a concept determined by a law of nature) it does appear to follow a rule; that is, of universal validity. Basically, the idea is that everyone ought to agree (uphold a standard) that certain forms in nature are beautiful, or beauty adheres in certain art objects.

Kant identifies four main features of the artistic genius. The first feature is originality. He describes it as:

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> … a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition of skill for that which can be learned in accordance with some rule, consequently that **originality** must be its primary characteristic (5: 308, Kant, 2000, p. 186).

Here he is distinguishing the genius from the skilled artisan. He does not deny that certain artistic skills can be learnt, rather he argues that the artistic genius produces works that are genuinely new rather than merely reproducing or imitating existing art. Significantly, Kant describes the genius as producing 'beautiful art,' which aligns with the modern sense of fine art. He explicitly distinguishes this from the broader sense of art as a practice or technique, employed by the early eighteenth century accounts (5: 307, Kant, 2000, p. 186).

The second feature is that the artistic genius is 'exemplary' of the art world. For Kant, this is meant to identify and judge true originality, and distinguish it from 'original nonsense.' He writes:

> … while not themselves the result of imitation, they [geniuses] must yet serve others in that way, i.e., as a standard or a rule for judging' (5: 308, Kant, 2000, p. 186).

As such, the artistic genius is the example that all other aspiring artists should imitate and the genius's artwork forms an exemplar of its kind. Similarly to the early eighteenth century accounts, though, Kant seems to think that merely positing that the genius has the capacity for originality is sufficient for identifying and judging this distinction between a true original and nonsense. However, this makes it prone to the same Pyrrhonian reply.

The third feature of Kant's account is that the artistic genius spontaneously produces or creates art through the genius's given nature, or natural inspiration. As Kant puts it, at length:

> That it cannot itself describe or indicate scientifically how it brings its product into being, but rather that it gives the rule as **nature**, and hence the author of a product that he owes to his genius does

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not know himself how the ideas for it come to him, and also does not have it in his power to think up such things at will or according to plan, and to communicate to others precepts that would put them in a position to produce similar products. (For that is also presumably how the word "genius" is derived from [Latin] *genius*, in the sense of the particular spirit given to a person at birth, which protects and guides him, and from whose inspiration those original ideas stem.) (5: 308, Kant, 2000, p. 187).

Similarly to Shaftesbury, Kant is connecting his understanding of artistic genius with the ancient meaning of a guiding spirit, and sense of inspiration. However, Kant is claiming that it is simply the manifestation and movement of the genius's given nature, rather than any sense of being moved by actual or metaphorical spirits.

The fourth feature of Kant's account is that the artistic genius is required to fulfil the standard of beauty, that is, conforms to the rules of art. In this way, the genius's inspiration is not lawless just that the rules of art are not the determinate laws of natural science. Kant describes it thus:

That by means of genius nature does not prescribe the rule to science but to art, and even to the latter only insofar as it is to be beautiful art (5: 308, Kant, 2000, p. 187).

So it follows for Kant, that what distinguishes the genius from the mere producers (craftspeople) of art-like things (craft) is that the genius's work is rightly judged to be beautiful. This aligns with the early eighteenth century accounts that appeal to the *sublime genius* as correctly judging and expressing the *true sublime*. Overall, then, Kant repeats many of the features seen in the early eighteenth century accounts. However, according to Kant, originality is the central and defining feature of the artistic genius.

Kant's account and its focus on originality is understood to have been influenced by Gerard's *An Essay on Genius*. Gerard describes both the artistic and scientific genius in terms of invention. He writes:

Genius is properly the faculty of invention; by means of which a man is qualified for making new discoveries in science, or for producing original works of art (Gerard, 1774, p. 8).

He goes on to claim that: 'Whatever falls short of this [invention], is servile imitation' (1774, p. 9). For Gerard, then, the defining feature of the genius is the capacity for invention, and for the artistic genius it is the production of original works. Significantly, he distances this from imitation, marking a clear break from the earlier accounts.

Gerard locates the genius's inventive capacity within his understanding of the general workings of the human mind. He generally describes these workings, in relation to 'fancy,' as follows:

As fancy has an indirect dependence both on sense and memory, from which it receives the first elements of all its conceptions, so when it exerts itself in the way of genius. It has an immediate connexion with judgment, which must constantly attend it, and correct and regulate its suggestions. This connexion is so intimate, that a man can scarce be said to have invented till he has exercised his judgment. But still it is true that imagination invents, and judgment only scrutinizes and determines concerning what it has invented. It is imagination that produces genius; the other intellectual faculties lend their assistance to rear the offspring of imagination to maturity (Gerard, 1774, p. 37).

His account of the human mind is based on four main faculties: sense, memory, imagination and judgement.

Gerard suggests how his four faculties work in the mind of the genius. Basically, his picture can be summarised thus: Sense refers to our direct sensing or perception of the world. Memory is where we hold and recall these perceptions and related conceptions of the world. The imagination is where these sensations and conceptions can be variously, and originally associated. And judgement as the centre of reason regulates these imaginings. Taking 'fancy' to be general imagining, this is when the imagination takes the sensations and conceptions of the world (both

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through the senses and recalled from memory). As the seat of invention, the imagination makes the sorts of associations that turns these perceptions and memories into something new. Pure fancy has no limits. However, the correct employment of judgement determines the reasonableness of fancy; it both identifies the truly original thought from the nonsense that falls outside of standards of reason and taste. The mind of the genius has the best imagination to invent true originals as properly regulated or limited by the other faculties. Therefore, on Gerard's account, the artistic genius makes the best choices or combination of associations to produce a truly original work (1774, p. 44).

From this thesis's discussion of Shaftesbury and Dennis, along with Pope's response, the central defining feature of the *sublime genius* has been found to be the capacity to perfectly imitate true nature. Recall, for instance, Shaftesbury writing that Homer:

> … retained only what was decent of the figurative or metaphoric style, introduced the natural and simple; and turned his thoughts towards the real beauty of composition, the unity of design, the truth of characters, and the just imitation of nature in each particular (*Characteristics*: 109).

Significantly, on these accounts the perfect nature to be imitated is a form of natural harmony of the soul. Recall, for instance, in describing the proper art of poetry, Dennis writes:

> … that nothing can make him [i.e., a human] Happy, but what can remove that Discord, and restore the Harmony of the Human Faculties. So that that must be the best and the noblest Art, which makes the best Provision at the same Time for the Satisfaction of all the Faculties, the Reason, the Passions, the Senses (CW1: 263).

Moreover, these accounts argue for a symmetry between the perfectly harmonious nature of the *sublime genius* and the natural harmony that the genius elicits in others (either in poetry or philosophy).

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Overall, then, there are three aspects to the eighteenth century shift in the concept of genius. One aspect is that the central defining feature of the genius goes from perfection of nature to true originality. Notably, these respective propensities are, in both cases, described as a special natural capacity of the genius. The second aspect of the shift is that the art of the genius goes from being imitation to invention. This leads to the third aspect of the shift, namely that the relevant cause goes from God's divine nature to the genius's nature; that is, the power to create the truly new goes from God to human. This describes the shift in the concept of the genius, but it does not offer any reasons for it. And there does not appear to be an explanation in the existing literature. Although there are significant amounts of philosophical discussion of Kant's account and his influence on the subsequent understanding of genius, there is currently little existing literature by historians of aesthetics on the preceding eighteenth century accounts. Peter Kivy's section 'Genius and the Creative Imagination' in *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century* appears as perhaps the best survey of the particular period in question (see also: (Battersby, 1989; Cassirer, 1951)). Nevertheless, consistent with the historians of aesthetics' conventional approach, Kivy aims to track the development of the concept of the genius defined in terms of originality.

Kivy is sensitive to the ancient origins of the term 'genius,' and its influence on the eighteenth century accounts. He suggests that Plato's sense of 'inspiration' and Longinus's 'natural genius' are synthesised in the eighteenth century genius. Kivy describes Longinus's influence as follows:

But what is most distinctive about Longinian sublimity, and its relation to genius—what indeed made the deepest impression on the aestheticians of the British Enlightenment—is the notion that the sublime in literary composition is, by nature, always in some way flawed, genius, its source, a faculty necessarily prone to negligence of the "correct rules" of literary composition. Furthermore, and perhaps most important, the sublime, with its

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necessary imperfections is, nevertheless, to be valued far above the correct and flawless. (Kivy, 2013, p. 5)

Here Kivy rightly observes that the eighteenth century adoption and adaption of Longinus rejects the *sublime style* and that the true genius is 'flawed' regarding these rules. However, in focussing on the development of genius as a true original, Kivy's account over-emphasises the flawed genius, and overlooks the appeal to perfect nature in the early eighteenth century accounts of the *sublime genius*.

Nevertheless, I agree with Kivy that Addison forms the eighteenth century origin of the modern aesthetic concept of genius understood in terms of originality (Kivy, 2013, p. 6). The prime reason for this is that Addison introduces the aesthetic category of 'novelty.' He describes it in his famed series of *The Spectator* articles collectively described as 'The Pleasures of the Imagination.' Also naming it the 'uncommon' Addison writes:

> Everything that is new or uncommon raises pleasure in the imagination, because it fills the soul with an agreeable surprise, gratifies its curiosity, and gives it an idea of which it was not before possessed (No. 412, 1712).

It is important to note that Addison does not connect his appeal to novelty with the concept of genius. In 'The Pleasures of the Imagination,' he suggests the writer's 'great art' is 'pleasing allusions,' which Addison relates to true nature. Addison's direct account of genius, which appears in the much earlier article, No. 160 of *The Spectator* (1711), repeats the central claims of primarily Dennis and the Longinian Tradition, that is, genius is greatness of true nature.

Still the question remains open: why does Addison introduce novelty? And why does the appeal to originality over imitation become such a significant feature of eighteenth century aesthetic theory?

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