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‘Pleasing Wonder and profound Awe’: On the Sublime

Endre Szécsényi

‘Open an eighteenth-century work on aesthetics, and the odds are that it will contain a substantial treatment of the beautiful, the sublime, the picturesque in nature.’[1] So begins Ronald W. Hepburn’s famous paper of 1966, the repeatedly re-published and frequently cited ‘Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty’. This opening suggests that, in his aesthetic thinking, Hepburn attributes great significance to the eighteenth century and to its substantial aesthetic categories; it further suggests that he clearly sees the theoretical priority of nature to arts in this period. Even though he does not provide any reference here, he most probably has in mind Walter John Hipple’s history of British eighteenth-century aesthetics.[2] In his 1960 review of Hipple’s book, he wrote: ‘It is not scholarly in the sense of being pedantic […] There are numerous shrewd comments by the way on the relevance of aspects of the eighteenth-century controversies to twentieth century aesthetics.’[3] Conspicuously, Hepburn shares Hipple’s attitude towards the major eighteenth-century aesthetic issues as having relevance for contemporary theories, and he praises this book as a scholarly enterprise of ‘much more than a purely historical significance’. With this acclaimed feature, Hepburn indirectly expresses his doubts about the values of historical or intellectual historical investigations. He continues this criticism throughout his life, such as when, almost fifty years later, in his review of James Kirwan’s *Sublimity*, he detects a ‘tension between Kirwan’s commitments as historian of ideas and as philosopher.’[4] Though I would not want to deny the possibility of such

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1 Ronald W. Hepburn, ‘Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty’ in Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (eds), *British Analytical Philosophy* (London, 1966), 285–310, 285.

2 Walter John Hipple, *The Beautiful, The Sublime, & The Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale, 1957).

3 Ronald W. Hepburn, ‘Review of Walter John Hipple’s *The Beautiful, The Sublime, & The Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory*’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 10 (1960), 188–9, 188.

4 Ronald W. Hepburn, ‘Review of James Kirwan’s *Sublimity*’, *The British Journal of*

kind of tension, I think that Hepburn maintains too sharp a contrast between live or vivid philosophical interest and mere (and probably insipid) historical (or 'historicist') interest. When he discusses authors of the past, basically he treats them as his contemporaries, this way his interpretations and analyses become really breathing. Yet, I think, in certain cases, the discussed theories' embeddedness in different traditions, their interconnections and their broader historical contexts, may offer more potential for contemporary thinking than Hepburn's way of interpretation can unravel. Thus my paper has a somewhat apologetic tone in so far as I am suggesting that intellectual history is not of mere antiquarian engagement whose sole aim is to enrich our inventory of past ideas, instead, it can result in new insights even on well-discussed themes such as 'the beautiful', 'the sublime' and 'the picturesque'. And that the 'numerous shrewd comments' by the way on the historical materials cannot (and must not) substitute for the reflections upon the historical dynamics or evolution of the ideas in question. Moreover, intellectual historical investigations could cast some light on the scholar's blind spots and/or unreflected prejudices concerning the given topic.

When, in the 1960s, Hepburn begins to criticise his contemporaries' neglect of natural beauty, he implicitly returns to the roots of modern aesthetics. In this, he actually turns back to the theoretical issues of the late-seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when the primordial layer of modern aesthetic experience was being shaped in encounters with nature and not, primarily, art. In that period, 'the aesthetic' was interwoven with an emerging type of nature-experience, and this is not to deny that there were new, though less spectacular, developments in art theory, rhetoric, or criticism. In the first attempts in this period to formulate and philosophically treat the surprising perspectives of nature, we can find a fertile though sometimes confused mixture of the scientific-rational, the sensitive-emotional, the moral, the religious-spiritual, or even the medical-medicinal aspects of the experience of nature – this multidisciplinary character can also be found in of Hepburn's approach to nature.

In this paper, I shall focus on the concept of the sublime, its modernity, and its multifarious phenomena, to show the richness of its history in a historical period that is less discussed in Hepburn's writings. My further aim is to demonstrate that historical investigation can discover strands in the modern tradition of the sublime that could be useful for a contemporary philosopher who deals with this aesthetic-theological complex and its possible significance

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Aesthetics, 47 (2007), 217–9, 219.

for the present, and also that the historical reflections can help us better understand and evaluate Hepburn's philosophical position and achievement on this subject.

1 The modernity of the sublime

If one is interested in the emergence of the modern aesthetic experience of nature, or in how aesthetic experience can offer or even create beauties in nature, as Hepburn was deeply interested, the topic of the sublime seems inevitable. His paper 'The Concept of the Sublime: Has it any Relevance for Philosophy Today?' of 1988 is Hepburn's most fully worked out contribution to the topic, but he dealt with the sublime in several other writings, implicitly or explicitly. Most notably, in the last section on the 'aesthetic aspects' of wonder in his inaugural lecture of 1980 to the Aristotelian Society,[5] in the section 'Versions of Sublimity' of his oft-cited article 'Nature Humanised: Nature Respected',[6] or in his posthumously published 'The Aesthetics of Sky and Space'.[7] As such, the sublime remained integral to his life-long advocacy for the contemporary significance of the aesthetic experience of nature, and he repeatedly criticizes those – from Paul Guyer to Philip Fisher or Kirwan – who doubt the relevance of the sublime nowadays. Conspicuously, the sublime belongs to the core of Hepburn's crucial concepts including also natural beauty, wonder, the sacred and the numinous. These notions somewhat overlap and are capable of occasionally exemplifying or explaining each other.

Hepburn's interpretation of the sublime is inspiringly complex, he surveys and analyses various versions of the sublime, ancient and modern, natural and artistic, cautious and bombastic, religious and secular, etc.[8] In the following quasi-definition, he displays it in a narrower historical context:

5 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Wonder' in idem, '*Wonder' and Other Essays* (Edinburgh, 1984), 131–54, 151–2.

6 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Nature Humanized: Nature Respected', *Environmental Values,* 7 (1998), 267–79, 276–7.

7 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'The Aesthetics of Sky and Space', ed. Emily Brady, *Environmental Values*, 19 (2010), 273–88. Interestingly, although this paper discusses theoretical problems concerning the 'immensely diverse' versions of the aesthetic experience of space, including vast and immense space, the term 'sublime' or 'sublimity' only fleetingly arises. (Ibid., 274, 279, 282.)

8 His aim, however, was not to paint a comprehensive picture of the available theories of the sublime, since he does not discuss authors like F. W. J. Schelling, G. W. F.

> The concept of sublimity was fashioned in response to a need – a need to name a memorable, powerful and perplexing experience (or range of experiences) of undoubted aesthetic value, yet not experience of beauty as understood in neoclassical aesthetic theory. It combined, or fused, dread at the overwhelming energies of nature and the vastnesses of space and time with a solemn delight or exhilaration. Landscapes, notably, could evoke the experience – and Alpine travellers were among the first to struggle to describe it. The exhilaration was hard to account for, and was explained in very different ways, many of which involved an essential metaphysical-imaginative component.[9]

Despite the historical tone of this passage, Hepburn never reflects on the emergence of our concept of the sublime as simultaneous with that of modern aesthetic experience. The sublime, however, is a paradigmatic experience of modern aesthetics *per se*,[10] especially, but not exclusively, if we think of the aesthetic experience of nature. Even with its ancient root in Pseudo-Longinus's *Peri hypsous* from the first century A.D., it had to be re-born in Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux's French translation of the Greek text in 1674. This re-birth of the concept made it a crucial category of modern aesthetics. Incidentally, Boileau's translation gave 'the sublime' a special connotation lacking in the incompletely preserved Greek text, namely, a deep interconnection with 'the marvellous'.[11] This 'marvellous' is evidently a version of that 'wonder' which

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Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche (who was just fleetingly mentioned), Sigmund Freud, Thomas Weiskel, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard or Hayden White – just to mention a few influential theoreticians.

9 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination', *Environmental Values,* 5 (1996), 191–204, 201.

10 Or as Lyotard famously put it: 'Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe this contradictory feeling – pleasure and pain, joy and anxiety, exaltation and depression – was christened or re-christened by the name of the *sublime*. It is around this name that the destiny of classical poetics was hazarded and lost; it is in this name that aesthetics asserted its critical rights over art, and that romanticism, in other words, modernity, triumphed.' Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde' in idem, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge, 1991), 89–107, 92. Lyotard, however, discusses the sublime only in the realm of art as 'the only mode of artistic sensibility to characterize the modern.' Ibid., 93.

11 Clarence DeWitt Thorpe, 'Addison and Some of His Predecessors on "Novelty"', *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America*, 52 (1937), 1114–29, 1125; Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge, 2015), 103–4. Doran suggests that there could be a link between Longinus's *hypsos* and Torquatto Tasso's poetical conception of *la meraviglia*, the latter also greatly influencing on

is another key-concept in Hepburn's thinking. Following Boileau's translation and preface, modern theories of the sublime proliferated, as did various experiences of it.[12] In his 1966 paper,[13] Hepburn warns that 'when a set of human experiences is ignored in a theory relevant to them, they tend to be rendered less readily available as experiences'.[14] While, it is also true, growing theoretical interest fosters the relevant experiences. This is exactly what happened in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries with the sublime. This story had a special feature at least until the 1740s (that is, until the appearance of John Baillie's and then Edmund Burke's theories): the relationship between Longinian sublime (frequently called 'rhetorical') and natural sublimity was far from being clarified. At the same time, this relationship could have a latent dynamic for such authors as John Dennis and Joseph Addison. They utilised the Longinian-Boileauean term in their literary criticism or poetics, and they were the most influential propagators of the new natural sublimity, although they (specifically Dennis and Addison) *never* used the term 'sublime' and never cited Longinus in the context of the experience of nature.

This Longinian-Boileauean sublime seems crucial for the emergence of modern aesthetics from a different perspective, too, when we consider the new code of social behaviour, self-representation and politeness formulated in the writings of seventeenth-century courtly moralists and certain critics of Neo-Classicism. The keywords of this discourse, like *goût, finesse* and *délicatesse*, denoted – as Elena Russo writes – 'a kind of empirical judgements that could be applied not only to the appreciation of aesthetic objects but also to discernment in worldly interactions. The domain of the aesthetic and that of worldliness were coextensive: The same type of rationality informed aesthetic judgement and the capacity to find one's way through the social labyrinth'.[15] On the sublime in particular, discussing poetics (rhetoric) within the category of *bienséance* (*decorum*) and polite manners, René Rapin – in his *Du grand ou du sublime* and

Boileau's sublime. Ibid., 104.

12 It has been noted, however, that a manuscript French translation of *Peri hypsous* existed from 1645, with a showable reception of Longinus before Boileau primarily in French culture. Cf. Éva Madeleine Martin, 'The "Prehistory" of the Sublime in Early Modern France: An Interdisciplinary Perspective' in Timothy M. Costelloe (ed.), *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, 2012), 77–101; or Emma Gilby, *Sublime Worlds: Early Modern French Literature* (London, 2006), 2–4.

13 It was developed from his shorter article: 'Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 3 (1963), 195–209.

14 Hepburn, 'Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty', 288.

15 Elena Russo, *Styles of Enlightenment. Taste, Politics, and Authorship in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore, 2007), 143.

the appended *L'Éloquence des biénséances* – relies on the Longinean-Boileauean inseparability of the marvellous and the sublime.[16] He claims that, unlike heroism, the sublime in human heart is independent of social rank, being an ideal which has to be accomplished under any social circumstances.[17] I would add to this that Baltasar Gracián, in his influential *Oráculo manual* of 1647, already explained how a courtier had to raise admiration in his genuinely hostile social environment to preserve himself and increase his reputation: 'It is the *Pleasure* of Novelty [*la admiración de la novedad*], that makes Events to be valued. There is neither *Delight* [*gusto*], nor *Profit*, in playing one's Game too openly. Not to Declare immediately, is the way to hold Minds in suspence […]. We ought therefore to imitate the Method of God Almighty [*proceder divino*], who always keeps Men in suspence.'[18] Nevertheless, this social-cultural approach is beyond the scope of Hepburn's thinking on the sublime and thus of the present paper, too. Let us go back to nature!

The modern 'aesthetic' experience of nature seems to be fundamentally different from the classical, poetically or artistically formed or pre-shaped, experience of nature famously manifested in the genre of the pastoral (the world of shepherds) and that of the georgic (the world of husbandmen). In one of his pastoral essays (*The Tatler*, No. 218), Addison describes the beauties of nature[19] during a countryside walk as 'the pleasantest Scene in the World to one who had pass'd a whole Winter in Noise and Smoak'. He notes how views of fields and meadows, the freshness of the dews and the air, flowers and

16 '[C]omme il peut y avoir du Merveilleux en toutes choses, il peut y avoir aussi du Sublime: c'est à dire ce comble de perfection qui saisit le cœur, & remplit l'âme d'admiration.' René Rapin, *Du grand ou du sublime dans les moeurs et dans les differentes conditions des hommes. Avec quelques observations sur l'Éloquence des Bienséances* (Paris, 1686), 5.

17 Cf. László Kisbali, 'Ízlés és képzelet: az esztétikai beszédmód kialakulása a XVIII. században [Taste and Imagination: the Formation of Aesthetic Discourse in the Eighteenth Century]' in idem, *Sapere aude! Esztétikai és művelődéstörténeti írások* (Budapest, 2009), 61–72, 68. Rapin's separation of the sublime as a moral ideal from the heroic values was an important development, especially if we consider how closely Boileau linked Longinus (and the life of the historical Longinus Cassius) to heroism in his preface to his Longinus's translation.

18 Baltasar Gracián, *The Art of Prudence, or, a Companion for a Man of Sense*, trans. Mr Savage (2nd edn, London, 1705), 2–3. (In the first edition of this English translation we can find 'admiration' in the first line of this aphorism.)

19 Addison explicitly cites the beauty, not the sublimity, of nature, yet the following suggests the overwhelming and mixed ('agreeable Confusion') effect of the sublime: 'I lost my self with a great deal of Pleasures among several Thickets and Bushes that were filled with a great Variety of Birds, and an agreeable Confusion of Notes'. Joseph Addison et al, *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond (3 vols, Oxford, 1987), III, 140.

birdsongs, etc. 'created in me the same Kind of animal Pleasure, and made my Heart overflow with such secret Emotions of Joy and Satisfaction as are not to be described or accounted for.' Then he adds: 'Those who are conversant in the writings of polite authors, receive an additional entertainment from the country, as it revives in their memories those charming descriptions, with which such authors do frequently abound.'[20] Literary erudition, then, can offer 'an additional entertainment', but it seems to be independent of the aesthetic experience of nature which concerns some instinctive part in us, and in the case of the sublime this 'touch' is even more elementary – as later, in a different context, Burke will also suggest. The counterpart of the 'original' state of nature is the immediate and 'instinctive' reaction of the human mind to this peculiar object, the discovery of untouched or new-born nature simultaneously uncovers new, yet actually ancient, regions in human soul. As the original state of nature can symbolize its prelapsarian state, so a heightened aesthetic state of mind can have rich spiritual connotations. Addison, now in *The Spectator* (No. 393), describes an aesthetic, 'habitual Disposition of Mind' as a very active consciousness that 'consecrates every Field and Wood, turns an ordinary Walk into a Morning or Evening Sacrifice, and will improve those transient Gleams of Joy, which naturally brighten up and refresh the Soul on such Occasions, into an inviolable and perpetual State of Bliss and Happiness.'[21] It is worth noting the series of active verbs in this quotation.

With this I am suggesting that the sublime is not universally given, it had to be invented, or at least, re-invented at a certain period of history, when new claims – spiritual, intellectual, emotional – arose, to which sublime experience seemed an adequate reply. The sublime itself directed and further shaped these claims. Hepburn seems to agree with those who discuss the historical significance of the emergence of the sublime: it 'once helped the imagination to cope with the post-Newtonian cosmos and to deploy religious feeling on a remodelled nature'. However, he calls our attention to the danger if we link this experience too tightly to this historical scene: 'I think that much of both aesthetic and religious value is liable to be lost if we accept [this historical interpretation] uncritically or resignedly and see the idea of the sublime as long ago snatched from us by historically inevitable change.'[22] While I share Hepburn's

20 Ibid.

21 Joseph Addison et al, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond (5 vols, Oxford, 1965), III, 476.

22 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'The Concept of the Sublime: Has it any Relevance for Philosophy Today?', *Dialectics and Humanism,* 15 (1988), 137–55, 139.

opinion that this 'historicist claim' cannot support the view about the unavailability of the sublime experience to us,[23] still I think that the historical approach cannot be discredited on this basis. The modern history of the sublime, with all of its fluctuations, its hopes and engagements, is an inevitable constituent of contemporary sublime experience. When we are having a genuinely sublime experience, actually we are standing at the current end-point of a broad and undoubtedly multifarious *modern* tradition whose different features enrich or, in a worse case, simply determine our current experience.

If we recognise the spiritual connotations in the instinctive reactions to nature's sublimity and beauties which were first formulated – partly discovered, partly invented – by authors of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, then the sublime can be conceived (as it really was in this period) as a religious exercise. If we take the religious in a broader sense to embrace even non-theistic spirituality, then we can follow Hepburn and concentrate on 'thought about the *subject-self*, and the *religious* ideas presupposed in certain accounts of the sublime both theistic and non-theistic',[24] agreeing with his reason to 'doubt if there was ever a "pure" aesthetic version of the sublime, devoid of all religious and ethical elements and to which aesthetics may seek to return.'[25] Undoubtedly, this complex experience with its different versions has been embedded in the emergence of our European modernity.

There is, then, something intriguingly and radically modern in the aesthetic experience of the world in general, that is also relevant to the self-image or self-definition of modern man. It exists in the encounter with a surprisingly new otherness of nature, which was also an occasion for redefining the beholding self. The sublime does not simply express or somehow humanize the infinite and inhuman features of nature as it emerged in new natural sciences including astronomy, biology, geology and geography. Rather, the sublime adds to the experience of individuality by confronting one with some overwhelming yet alluring presence. The fathomless abyss of the individual human mind corresponds to – yet without *harmonizing* with – the inexpressible depth of nature. Thus, the sublime experience transcends both logic and rhetoric in lying beyond the realms of language and the concept, for *individuum est ineffabile*.

23 Notably, Hegel had already associated the sublime with the ancient age of fine arts.

24 Hepburn, 'The Concept of the Sublime', 137.

25 Ibid., 147.

2 'Versions of Sublimity'

Interpreting the eighteenth-century tradition of the sublime, Hepburn focuses mostly on authors of the last decade, primarily on Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller, and he only briefly brings in earlier theoreticians like Addison, Alexander Gerard, Baillie, James Usher, Burke, and Thomas Reid.[26] It is also fair to say that he practically ignores late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century predecessors like Dominique Bouhours, Boileau, Rapin, Dennis, and Shaftesbury. Interestingly, however, he cites other seventeenth-century authors who played important roles in the pre-history of the modern sublimity, even if Hepburn never uses the term in this context. I refer to his first academic writings, in the 1950s, primarily his unpublished dissertation, *Cosmology and Value*, and the three separate journal articles, developed chapters from that dissertation, on Thomas Traherne, Godfrey Goodman and George Hakewill. Here I shall discuss only Goodman's and Hakewill's famous debate about the Cosmic Fall and the current metaphysical status of created nature. Hepburn gives us a clear hint at the direct *aesthetic* consequences of this theological debate in a brief 'Postlude' after the chapters on Goodman and Hakewill in his dissertation. Its title is 'The Aesthetic Fall':

> in the majority of Cosmic Fall theories [there] is the claim not only that the fertility, orderliness and harmony of the world have been lost, but its beauty also. The Golden Age was unanimously pronounced an age of consummate beauty. The language of declension from the Golden Age frequently implies both loss of power and beauty…[27]

Hepburn's concern here is the tradition of Goodman's *Fall of Man* (1616)[28] and its opposition in Hakewill's *Apologie of the Power and Providence of God* (1627), which argued for a cyclic model of the world against the permanent decay model of Goodman, in an age, as Tuveson claimed, that 'at least equalled, and in many cases excelled the ancient world in achievements.'[29] In this 'Postlude',

26 Ibid., 140, 142–3.

27 Ronald W. Hepburn, *Cosmology and Value: Studies in the Argumentation of Certain Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Works of Philosophical and Literary Concerns* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1955), 237–8.

28 Goodman's position otherwise mostly relied on St. Cyprian's ideas and the authority of the Scriptures. Cf. Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress* (Gloucester, Mass., 1972), 71.

29 Ibid., 73.

besides Goodman, Hepburn refers to Jean-François Senault's *L'Homme criminel* (1644) and its English translation (1650), Edmund Spenser's poetry, Samuel Purchas's *Pilgrimage* (1617), and, finally to Thomas Burnet's *Telluris theoria sacra* (1681) and Henry More's *Antidote against Atheism* (1652) – the latter two are slightly more familiar from the literature of the pre-history of modern aesthetics. Burnet's theory is usually an inevitable source of the early history of the sublime, though Hepburn speaks explicitly about *beauty* throughout these passages.[30]

In the tradition which emphasizes the fall of man and nature, and that of beauty and harmony in the world, we can, paradoxically, identify the fertile ground for the emergence of the modern sublime. Burnet speaks about the 'breaking up of the ideally beautiful spherical earth' of the original Creation and seeing 'mountains as "nothing but great ruines". […] But here and there appear definite glimpses of aesthetic appreciation also. Mountains are shadows and reminders of the infinite in their vast size; they can be august and stately.'[31] Burnet's passages on the theologico-aesthetic complexity of the appreciation of mountains, to which Hepburn briefly refers, became seminal loci for early theories of the natural sublime, such as Dennis's letters about his tour through the Alps, Addison's writings including – besides a Latin ode to Burnet – notably a description of mountain landscape by Lake Geneva in his *Remarks of Several Parts of Italy* (1705), a work deeply influenced by Dennis,[32] and the famous mountain prospect in Shaftesbury's *Moralists* (1709).[33] The seminal monograph on this subject written by Marjorie Hope Nicolson[34] was first published only four years after the completion of Hepburn's dissertation, but he does not utilise her book in his later writings, except for two brief references.[35] A gap somehow remained between Hepburn's late seventeenth-century and late eighteenth-century interests.

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30 Even when he later returns to this subject in his article entitled 'Cosmic Fall', he insists on this terminology, and though he discusses other authors (but not the ones I mentioned above), the argumentation remains the same. Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Cosmic Fall' in Philip P. Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas* (1968; 4 vols, New York, 1973), I, 504–13.

31 Hepburn, *Cosmology and Value*, 239.

32 Cf. Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*, 127.

33 Lord Shaftesbury, 'The Moralists, a Philosophical Rhapsody' in idem *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, 1999), 231–338, 316.

34 Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory. The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Ithaca, NY, 1959).

35 The exceptions are: Hepburn, 'Cosmic Fall', 513 and 'Poetry and "Concrete

At the same time, the other side can also be intriguing from the perspective of modern aesthetics and of the sublime, too.[36] On Hakewill's *Apologie,* Hepburn insightfully writes:

> Only in part is [Hakewill's] aim the communication of information; more important is his invitation to see the old world in a new way – a conversion of attitude, which is the final objective of the entire work. The cumulative effect of images […] builds up … a frame of mind in which the ideas of the world's fecundity, richness and vigour appear quite incontestable, even uncontroversial.[37]

This is the very project of the newly elaborated aesthetic experience, in the early eighteenth century, to view the world 'in another Light', as Addison will famously say, and foster a new 'frame of mind' to discover the charming aspects of the created world. And, more specifically, according to Hepburn, to reinforce his thesis on the fecundity and rejuvenation of nature, and 'to augment confidence in the future progress of arts and sciences', Hakewill uses 'the language of "expansion", "opening-up" and "the revealing of the hitherto unseen"'.[38] I think that this expansive, exploratory attitude – developed by means of metaphors and tropes, of which Goodman was highly suspicious[39] – is one of the major features of that type of sublimity of which Hepburn takes no count. This type is intertwined with novelty, wonder, and a re-shaped beauty, and it was especially prominent in the early eighteenth century. Its most influential representative was Addison, who describes his imaginative experience of the sublime as follows:

> a spacious Horison is an Image of Liberty, where the Eye has Room to range abroad, to expatiate at large on the Immensity of its Views, and to lose it self amidst the Variety of Objects that offer themselves to its Observation. Such wide and undetermined Prospects are as pleasing

Imagination": Problems of Truth and Illusion' in idem, '*Wonder*', 56–74, 73, n6.

36 In his later article, Hepburn already acknowledges the aesthetic relevance of Hakewill's position, cf. Hepburn, 'Cosmic Fall', 509.

37 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'George Hakewill: The Virility of Nature', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 16 (1955), 135–50, 147.

38 Ibid., 150.

39 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Godfrey Goodman: Nature Vilified', *The Cambridge Journal,* 7 (1954), 424–34, 433.

> to the Fancy, as the Speculations of Eternity or Infinitude are to the Understanding…[40]

This sublime is far from paralysing astonishment, suspension of the soul's activity, or any terror to be transformed into elevated relief. Having relied on late eighteenth-century theories, Hepburn prefers to apply a two-phase model, for example, in his 'Wonder' he writes: 'sublimity is essentially concerned with transformation of the merely threatening and daunting into what is aesthetically manageable, even contemplated with joy: and this achieved through the agency of wonder.'[41] It is quite a good description of the Burkean and even better for the Kantian sublime, but in Addison's moral essays, published a few decades before Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*, the sublime is rather an experience of freedom and an inexhaustible opportunity which enlarges the soul,[42] while the imagination is incapable of grasping 'the Largeness of a whole View' in total. Human beings are not able to possess the 'Kenn of an Angel'. Notably, Addison attributes the latter capacity to Satan in his interpretation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

> *Satan*, after having long wandered upon the Surface, or outmost Wall of the Universe, discovers at last a wide Gap in it, which led into the Creation, and is described as the Opening through which the Angels pass to and fro into the lower World, upon their Errands to Mankind. […] He looks down into that vast hollow of the Universe with the Eye, or (as *Milton* calls it in his first Book) with the Kenn of an Angel. He surveys all the Wonders in this immense Amphitheatre that lie between both the Poles of Heaven, and takes in at one View the whole Round of the Creation.[43]

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40 Addison, *The Spectator*, III, 541.

41 Hepburn, 'Wonder', 151.

42 It is true, in a later *Spectator* essay (No. 565), where Addison reports an astonishing encounter with the immensity of nature during a sunset, moonrise walk, he describes the 'secret Horror' and 'mortifying Thought' of our possible loss amongst the infinite number of creatures, but *then* this Pascalian despair is reconciled by the proper conception of the omnipresent and omniscient 'Divine Nature' in the subsequent meditation. Addison, *The Spectator*, IV, 530. This structure may remind us of the Kantian two-phase model of the sublime, though in Addison's case the complex experience of the walk into the 'immensity' of Nature is followed by a meditation on 'Divine Nature'.

43 Ibid., III, 146–7.

This intellectual (or 'rational') sublime exceeds the range of human mind.[44] The angelic 'View', however, is not truly 'aesthetic' at all, for it is not offered by the imagination of a living, bodily human being,[45] but by a kind of intellectual intuition in some pure spirit. Thus Addison's sublimity (i.e. the 'great') in his 'Pleasures of the Imagination' series (*The Spectator*, Nos. 411–421), despite its undoubtedly optimistic tone, cannot be subjected to the category of 'heroic' as Hepburn critically deems it, when the soul seems to extend *successfully* to the vast size of its object.[46]

Eventually, Hakewill's 'virility of nature' seems to echo in Addison's 'aesthetic' examples of nature, either in several Spring scenes – such as his dream of Paradise-garden 'amidst the Wildness' of 'cold, hoary Landskips' of mountains in his *Tatler* essay (No. 161) and his vernal views of nature (*Tatler*, No. 218, *Spectator*, No. 393, and elsewhere) – or in the quasi-erotic examples of the beautiful, also in his 'Imagination' papers, or in his descriptions of the natural sublime where the inexhaustible abundance is stressed. In Hakewill's *Apologie* 'we find constant reference to new birth, growth, and virility […]. Compensation or renewal can be counted upon to follow injurious events.'[47] Moreover:

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44 Henry Grove too remarks in the last essay of *The Spectator*: 'But alas! How narrow is the Prospect even of such a Mind [as Isaac Newton's]? and how obscure to the Compass that is taken in by the Ken of an Angel; or of a Soul but newly escaped from its imprisonment in the Body!' Ibid., V, 171.

45 According to Addison, neither the imagination of a poet, nor that of a spectator is capable of grasping this view or range, and thus this rational sublime. Addison is very clear that even the beauties of this Miltonic speech is not of poetic nature, stirring, primarily, 'Thoughts of Devotion' but not 'Sentiments of Grandeur' in the soul. Ibid., III, 141. Interestingly, Hepburn, in his posthumous paper on the aesthetic experience of space, briefly returning to the seventeenth century, mentions some poems of John Donne and Book II of *Paradise Lost* in which space is 'mediated in the arts, and mainly in literature'. His short commentary on this part of *Paradise Lost* may suggest that Hepburn reads Milton through Romantic glasses. 'Milton gives an immensity to his representation of space, space between heaven, earth and hell. The emotional quality of this poetry is very rich: astonishment at the vastness, but modified by knowledge of the tragic events being initiated in the imminent Fall of Man – awe, sublimity and foreboding.' Hepburn, 'The Aesthetics of Sky and Space', 279.

46 Hepburn criticizes the different forms of 'soul-expansion' as a 'heroic *adequacy* of the mind (or imagination) to its objects' in the conceptions of the sublime for Baillie, Edward Young, David Hume, the pre-critical Kant or Arthur Schopenhauer, and characterizes them as 'wildly optimistic theories'. Hepburn, 'The Concept of the Sublime', 142–3.

47 Hepburn, 'Cosmic Fall', 508.

> If fecundity and growth are emphasised by Hakewill, so equally *diversity*, as a basic positive value. Where his opponents tended to see diversified scenery (e.g., mountain-and-plain) as a declension from an original smoother, 'perfect', topography, the diversity itself is seen by Hakewill as intrinsically good. The debate over nature's alleged decay was thus, in important measure, a contest between alternative criteria of aesthetic value.[48]

The authors of the two theological or theologico-aesthetic sides represented by Goodman (Senault and Burnet, to whom we can add Dennis and Lord Shaftesbury) and by Hakewill (Sir Francis Bacon, Henry Power, John Ray, Pierre Bayle, Henry More and we can add Addison) elaborated ideas and intellectual means which proved necessary for developing the first theories of the sublime. Moreover, these two seventeenth-century streams fed two main river branches within the sublime tradition: the more contemplative, darker version that saw nature as a cosmic ruin beheld in the 'terrible joy' of astonishment, and the more active, adventurous, exploratory kind, associated with freedom and nature's ever-renewing and inexhaustible features.

Addison influentially connects this newly discovered and theorized experience not to the understanding but to the activity of imagination, a philosophical category which is also seminal for Hepburn's thought, whose activity is not only productive but even co-creative. This re-modelled imagination can first be grasped – and exercised and thus refined – in the experience of the natural sublime, and only by the polite imagination can we discover and enjoy the sublime (and the novel and the beautiful) in nature and in arts. The modern aesthetic has been autopoietic from the outset. Hepburn remarks that 'for Goodman, those imaginative "flights" we are capable of are, properly interpreted, no more than solemn and chastening reminders of the Paradise we have lost'[49] – for Addison, we can add, the now aesthetic flights of the imagination are opportunities to regain our lapsed innocence and to fore-taste the joys of afterlife. The paradigmatic example of this experience is the landscape in which the three main sources of the pleasures of the imagination – the great, the novel and the beautiful – can easily combine and intensify each other. I think Hepburn follows Addison's novel path when he claims that viewing a natural prospect requires a special internal faculty, namely, '(polite) imagination', or, for Hepburn, 'metaphysical imagination'. This imagination

48 Ibid., 509.

49 Hepburn, 'Godfrey Goodman: Nature Vilified', 434.

transforms the sensory around us into a unified experience which, at the same time, connects, directly or indirectly, to some metaphysics, that is, it leads us beyond the physical or everyday reality without ever transcending the sensory components, which remain indispensable for the 'landscape-experience', and are not merely occasions for an elevated spiritual experience.[50] Notably, this landscape-experience is a modern invention of Addison, Alexander Pope and their contemporaries. It is already an 'aesthetic' experience, that is, it is not a Platonic, Neo-Platonic or Stoic meditation, nor a Protestant occasional meditation cued by some particular physical or material phenomenon, to be left behind as soon as it serves its purpose.[51] It seems to me that with the adjective 'metaphysical' Hepburn tried preserving or regaining those spiritual connotations of imagination which were still evident for Addison and many of his contemporaries.

3 A 'delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy'

Though Hepburn does not discuss Dennis at all amongst Addison's contemporaries, his version of the (natural) sublime is highly influential and intriguing.

50 '[Metaphysical imagination is] an element of interpretation that helps to determine the overall experience of a scene in nature. It will be construed as a "seeing as…" or "interpreting as…" that has metaphysical character, in the sense of relevance to the whole of experience and not only to what is experienced at the present moment. Metaphysical imagination connects with, looks to, the "spelled out" systematic metaphysical theorising which is its support and ultimate justification. But also it is no less an element of the concrete present landscape-experience: it is fused with the sensory components, not a meditation aroused by these.' Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Landscape and the Metaphysical Imagination' in Sarah Johnson (ed.), *Landscapes* (Cambridge, 2010), 1–14, 2. Likewise, in the context of the place of values, referring to Karl Jaspers's 'immanent transcendence', Hepburn writes that the values 'are essentially the result of a cooperation of man and non-human nature', and by the recognition of 'the interdependence of man and his natural environment' we can realize that 'There is no wholly-other paradise from which we are excluded; the only transcendence that can be real to us is an "immanent" one.' Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Optimism, Finitude and the Meaning of Life' in idem *'Wonder'*, 155–85, 181–2.

51 Emily Brady notes that this Hepburnian remark 'fused with the sensory components' is a 'key point for environmental aesthetics, which has wholeheartedly embraced the need to develop theories that value nature on its own terms, in contrast to historical views such as the picturesque, which valued nature through the lens of human artifice.' Emily Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature* (Cambridge, 2013), 192, a volume dedicated to the memory of Ronald W. Hepburn. Arguably, not only 'environmental aesthetics' but modern aesthetics in general began with this new type of fusion.

Clearly distinguished from the traditional joy of meditation, its sublime transport is *explicitly* more than 'a delight that is consistent with Reason, a delight that creates or improves Meditation'.[52] Dennis was amongst the early Grand Tour travellers who passed through the Alps and/or the Pyrenees. His letters describing his extraordinary experiences 'mingled with horrours, and sometimes almost with despair' in his Alpine tour were published in 1693.[53] This journal of 1688 (as I have mentioned above) would greatly influence Addison and as well as Shaftesbury's famous hymn to the Nature-Deity in his *Moralists*.[54] Dennis describes the mountain prospects as 'altogether new and amazing', producing in him 'different motions', like 'a delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy, and at the same time that I was infinitely, [sic] pleas'd I trembled.'[55] Without mentioning his name, he agrees with Burnet that:

> these Mountains were not a Creation, but form'd by universal Destruction, when the Arch with a mighty flaw dissolv'd and fell into the vast Abyss […], then are *these Ruines of the old World the greatest wonders of the New*. For they are not only vast, but horrid, hideous, ghastly Ruins. […] [Later we descended] thro the very Bowels as it were of the Mountain, for we seem'd to be enclos'd on all sides: What an astonishing Prospect was there? Ruins upon Ruins in monstrous Heaps,

52 John Dennis, *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose* (London, 1693), 138. This distinction is highly significant, even if Barnouw convincingly argues that from the perspective of Dennis's oeuvre as literary critic, this opposition was later overthrown. In his major critical writings, 'the close connection between transport and meditation, between passion and insight […] in his conception of "enthusiastic passion"' is crucial. Although Barnouw too acknowledges that it is already 'a different idea of the sublime […] drawn from the roots of poetry.' Jeffrey Barnouw, 'The Morality of the Sublime to John Dennis', *Comparative Literature*, 35 (1983), 21–42, 27.

53 According to Thorpe, this is already the second edition, as the first came to light in the previous year. Cf. Clarence DeWitt Thorpe, 'Two Augustans Cross the Alps: Dennis and Addison on Mountain Scenery', *Studies in Philology*, 32 (1935), 463–82, 464, n5. Nevertheless, I could find no hint of an earlier edition in the 1693 volume I consulted.

54 When we fly over the African deserts by means of imagination, Theocles (Shaftesbury's mouthpiece) notes that 'All ghastly and hideous as they appear, they want not their peculiar beauties. The wildness pleases.' Then, we see the travellers trembling on the brink of a high mountain-path. They 'hear the hollow sound of torrents underneath and see the ruin of the impending rock, with falling trees which hang with their roots upwards', etc. They are contemplating 'the incessant changes of this earth's surface', 'while the apparent spoil and irreparable breaches of the wasted mountain show them the world itself only as a *noble ruin*'. Shaftesbury, 'The Moralists', 315–6.

55 Dennis, *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose*, 133–4.

> and *Heaven and Earth confounded*. The uncouth Rocks that were above us, Rocks that were void of all form, but what they had receiv'd from Ruine; the frightful view of the Precipices, and the foaming Waters that threw themselves headlong down them, made all such a Consort up for the Eye, as that sort of Musick does for the Ear, in which Horrour can be joyn'd with Harmony. I am afraid you will think that I have said too much. Yet if you had but seen what I have done, you would surely think that I have said too little.[56]

Already Clarence DeWitt Thorpe detected the peculiarity of Dennis's sublimity: 'There is […] quite definitely no indication of the later Wordsworthian feeling of kinship and of spiritual communion of nature.'[57] – which feeling as a kind of nature mysticism became so significant for Hepburn, too. Dennis's modern sublime experience has to do with destruction – the potential personal destruction of the spectator on the brink of a chasm and the actual cosmic destruction of the Fall – and devastating power, and not with creation, design and harmony. Elsewhere Dennis claims that, indeed, the 'Universe is regular in all its Parts, and it is to that exact Regularity that it owes its admirable Beauty. The Microcosm owes the Beauty and Health both of its Body and Soul to Order […]. Man was created […] regular, and as long as he remain'd so, continu'd happy', and also that the main goal of the noblest art, poetry, is 'to restore the Decays that happen'd to human Nature by the Fall'.[58] All this, however, concerns the world of perfect creation, its restoration and the Neo-Classical beauty of the original, and it has nothing to do with the sublimity in nature, with its complex, mixed feeling, such as his own 'delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy', Burnet's 'pleasing kind of stupor and admiration', or

56 Ibid., 139–40, my emphases – E. Sz.

57 Thorpe, 'Two Augustans Cross the Alps: Dennis and Addison on Mountain Scenery', 468. This remark is interesting even if Thorpe eventually suggests that 'in certain respects [Dennis's] experience is probably not so different from Woodsworth's own', and finally 'the whole experience led to meditation – reflections upon creation and re-creation.' Ibid., 466. Later, Nicolson interprets Dennis' letters and puts them in the context of Shaftesbury's and Addison's conceptions of natural sublimity. Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, 277ff. At the same time, she suggests that to 'Shaftesbury the Sublime is the highest Beauty'. Ibid., 322. However, the compatibility of Neo-Platonic rationality and the transparency of beauty with the emerging sublime experience (described by Dennis) is quite problematic. There is a complicated and unreflected duality between Dennis the traveller and aesthetic spectator of natural scenes and Dennis the literary critic and philosopher of culture.

58 John Dennis, 'The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry' in Edward Niles Hooker (ed.), *The Critical Works of John Dennis, vol. 1* (Baltimore, 1939), 325–73, 335–6.

Addison's 'agreeable kind of horror' in the view of mountains around Lake Geneva.[59] The newly discovered sublime of mountains, oceans, deserts, vast woods and the like is not a special case of the original beauty of Creation. We are in the presence of something immensely powerful and incomprehensible, the result of a cosmic event which happened ages after the Creation, something in which 'Heaven and Earth confounded', as Dennis wrote aptly. Its mixed nature cannot be transcended, its delight or joy does not come from some ultimately rational reconciliation. It is never a tranquillity, not even a balance, but always some vibrant and dynamically changing astonishment. Some strangeness or paradox always remains, either in the darker versions of the sublime like Dennis's, or in the happier and more liberated versions like Addison's. Moreover, it is not even the case that these rude and immense aspects of nature would constitute only a dark background for the greater brightness of the foreground beauty. Instead, during the sublime experience, an utmost incompatibility with nature can be felt, the unamendable break of the ancient harmony between the microcosm and the macrocosm – a loss that is not only privation, but an inexhaustible source of astonishment and inspiration.[60] In a sense, we can see deeper and can discover amazing new layers by surveying a ruin than by contemplating its original in perfect completion.

It is customary to interpret Dennis's sublime, mingled with terror, as '*incompatible* with beauty and reason' of the Neo-Classicist kind, and to evaluate his contribution as preparing 'the way for the aesthetic opposition between the sublime and the beautiful that will be fundamental to Burke's and Kant's accounts.'[61] Yet this incompatibility has a religious-devotional significance,

59 Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c. In the Years 1701, 1702, 1703* (London, 1767), 261.

60 Tellingly, even Shaftesbury, heir of the Cambridge Platonists, seems aware of the paradoxical experience of the sublime and its significance. In his *Moralists*, as the last in his series of unsociable natural places, he describes a sylvan prospect where 'horror seizes' the spectators: 'Here space astonishes. Silence itself seems pregnant while an unknown force works on the mind and dubious objects move the wakeful sense. […] Even we ourselves, who in plain characters may read divinity from so many bright parts of earth, choose rather these obscurer places to spell out that mysterious being, which to our weak eyes appears at best under a veil of cloud.' Shaftesbury, 'The Moralists', 316. This gloomy place remains beyond the scope of the bright intellect, meanwhile it irresistibly attracts, makes us feel the presence of that 'mysterious being' who is evidently not the 'forming form', nor the 'sovereign beauty' manifest in 'the bright parts of earth'. Shaftesbury here *implicitly* acknowledges the separate realm and significance of another theologico-aesthetics, that is, the claims of modern aesthetics of the sublime.

61 Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*, 139.

too. As Barnouw rightly claims, Dennis 'is explicitly antagonistic to deism and natural religion, and the deity figured forth in nature for man's moral benefit is not the benign and regular god of beauty and harmony so much as the angry, or better, unfathomable god suggested by oceans and mountains.' In his sublime mountain experience, there is a conspicuous 'predominance of the god of power and will, hidden or half-revealed in nature, over the divine rationality expressed in the regularity of nature'.[62] Linking Dennis to the British tradition from William Ockham through Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes to Milton and William Blake in which there has always been a resistance to natural religion and rational theology, Barnouw finds: the 'religious, poetic, and philosophical-psychological strands of this anti-rationalist tradition intertwine in Dennis.' Moreover, the 'intense passion of the sublime does not involve any withdrawal from sense experience for Dennis; rather, it emphasizes the continuity with sense, the positive interdependence of inner and outer.'[63] These features together show Dennis's sublime as the most radically new 'aesthetic' quality of nature, whose experience reveals not a benevolent and wise, but a powerful and mysterious (though not mystical) divine being.

Hepburn criticizes several eighteenth-century theories of the sublime as mere psychological efforts to make 'the threatening, menacingly huge external world' safe, by engulfing or internalizing it in fantasy. He adds that even 'for Kant the real locus of supreme value lies in the subject-self, not in any ostensible object beyond it', the emphases on human rationality and moral dignity in the experience of the natural sublime eventually degrade nature, and 'our "superiority" over nature' triumphs. 'The resurgent exhilarating moment, the counterweight, may be *too* effective, losing the note of natural piety, even of respect for the natural world, snapping the tension essential to the continuation of a sense of the sublime.'[64] If he had considered Dennis's sublimity – or

62 Barnouw, 'The Morality of the Sublime to John Dennis', 29.

63 Ibid. While others, like the Cambridge Platonists and, with the exception of some special loci, Shaftesbury 'charged that to stress God's will and power at the expense of his goodness and justice is tantamount to making God the author of evil […]. [Ralph Cudworth] believed Ockham to have been responsible for this unchristian view of God'. Sarah Hutton, *British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), 143.

64 Hepburn, 'The Concept of the Sublime', 143–5. Thus, it seems, 'Kant *has* presented us with an "angelic self", coping with infinites and absolutes', as Hepburn suggests it, referring also to Goethe's, Schiller's and Schopenhauer's Kantian accounts of the sublime. Ibid., 145. I have argued above, relying on the passage from Addison's commentary on the *Paradise Lost*, that the rational 'sublime' of Satan's 'angelic kenn' cannot be called 'aesthetic' at all, in the modern sense of the word.

even Addison's more seriously –, he could have found an early, influential model of sublime experience that did not see nature as essentially degraded, That theory could be interpreted as involving an 'other-regarding' experience that, further, provided a new kind of aesthetic piety, too. Moreover, Burnet's, Dennis's or Addison's natural sublime cannot appropriately be described as the succession or oscillation of two distinct phases, i.e. a daunting versus an exhilarating moment, which dualistic structure or process is presented as a more or less general scheme of the sublime in Hepburn's historic survey, both in religious and in nontheistic accounts of the sublime.[65]

The non-rational aspect of the sublime and its connotations of power and will also refer to a tradition outside the philosophical subjects in Hepburn's historical commentaries. Yet this non-rational sublime was highly significant for the emerging modern aesthetic of both nature and art, or the social-cultural. The proto-aesthetic language of the *je-ne-sais-quoi* (essentially, that of *délicatesse*) was elaborated in the second half of the seventeenth century, when this popular catch-phrase became a quasi-philosophical term, most famously in the fifth dialogue of Dominique Bouhours's *Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène* (1671), before falling into oblivion in the mid-eighteenth century, after Baron de Montesquieu's posthumous *Encyclopaedia* article on taste. Yet its major features survived, for example, in the general character of aesthetic experience or in Kant's concept of the 'aesthetic idea' as the production of the genial artist. We cannot, of course, define the *je-ne-sais-quoi*, the term expressing the very impossibility of conceptual definability. This is a kind of a secret, elusive charm which seizes us emotionally, or even subjugates us, that is, our will. Its meaning is rich and inexhaustible; but whose cause is unknowable for us. The *je-ne-sais-quoi* seems to be a prism through which the beams of the great tradition of beauty – order, design, unity, harmony, symmetry, natural ratios, light and transparency, etc. – converged into the triadic form of the sublime, the beautiful and the novel (in Addison's division). Consequently, these new, now aesthetic, categories carry the heritage of the *je-ne-sais-quoi*. It is not therefore surprising to find suggestions in Hepburn's writings that he too draws from this tradition. For example, in his article 'From World to God', he speaks about the analogy between 'numinous experience and some sorts of aesthetic experience, types of sublimity',[66] and though he considers this analogy as far from unproblematic, his conclusion is interesting:

65 Cf. ibid., 147ff.

66 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'From World to God', *Mind*, 72 (1963), 40–50, 49.

> If the situation were not ambiguous, if God were incontrovertibly revealed, then our belief would be constrained, our allegiance forced, and no place would be left for free and responsible decision whether to walk in God's ways and to entrust oneself to him in faith. Divine elusiveness is a necessary condition of our being able to enter upon properly personal relations with God.[67]

This 'divine elusiveness' seems to show the legacy of the *je-ne-sais-quoi* tradition in its irresistible effects on human will and in its potential to establish a (new) *personal* relationship with God, yet still preserving the freedom of will of the subject-self.

In his *Sublime Poussin*, Louis Marin argues that 'the sublime [of the late seventeenth century] stems from the "je ne sais quoi", but the "je ne sais quoi" cannot be reduced to the sublime. […] The sublime is a "je ne sais quoi" to the very extent that it appears difficult, if not impossible, to produce or construct a 'concept' of the sublime'.[68] Then he adds: 'As Boileau writes, [the je-ne-sais-quoi] is not properly "something that is proved and demonstrated but something that makes itself felt."'[69] What I would like to suggest with this approach to the sublime through the *je-ne-sais-quoi*, which displays it as the 'presentation of the unrepresentability' and 'the *pathos* of all the passions', as Marin puts it, is that it was originally a mysterious, meaningful experience, different from Kant's conception or Rudolf Otto's Kantian interpretation, which had a great impact on Hepburn's thought. In his *Das Heilige* (1917),

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67 Ibid., 50.

68 Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford, 1999), 210. According to Cronk, however, the case is the other way around, 'Boileau's concept of *le sublime* embraces the ineffability of Bouhours's *je ne sais quoi*'. Nicholas Cronk, *The Classical Sublime. French Neoclassicism and the Language of Literature* (Charlottesville, Va., 2002), 109. Be that as it may, undoubtedly there was a strong connection between the two concepts (Boileau also used the phrase *je-ne-sais-quoi* in the Preface to his Longinus translation), and I agree with Cronk that both concepts were 'devised or "invented" in the 1670s', partly as a response to a certain critical dilemma in Neo-Classicism, as he says, but partly as a response to some metaphysical claims. This is why I disagree with Doran's view that 'the *je-ne-sais-quoi* has nothing whatsoever to do with elevation or grandeur of spirit, an essential element of sublimity […], and it has no necessary relation to the idea of transcendence.' Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*, 106. If we look at Gracián's *despejo* and Bouhours's remarks on the divine grace at the end of the fifth dialogue on the *je-ne-sais-quoi* of his *Entretiens*, or at the long tradition of *gustus spiritualis* in the theology of divine senses from Origen onwards, we cannot consider the *je-ne-sais-quoi* as a merely secular, worldly or social concept.

69 Marin, *Sublime Poussin*, 211.

Otto too speaks about the analogy between the sublime and the numinous, and claims that the concept of the sublime 'remains [always] unexplicated; it has in it something mysterious, and in this it is like that of "the numinous"':

> [Moreover] the sublime exhibits the same peculiar dual character as the numinous; it is at once daunting, and yet again singularly attracting, in its impress upon the mind. It humbles and at the same time exalts us, circumscribes and extends us beyond ourselves, on the one hand releasing in us a feeling analogous to fear, and on the other rejoicing us.[70]

In the case of the sublime *je-ne-sais-quoi*, however, we do not necessarily encounter the duality of successive or oscillating extremes – it is more characteristic in Hepburn's interpretation. Even when something threatening appears in the *je-ne-sais-quoi* sublime experience, as in Bouhours's first dialogue of *Entretiens*, where the subject is the always 'marvellous' sea with its 'immense extension of water' and infinite variety of its appearances, the two aspects are mixed, folded down, as it were, into one, rather than moving or fluctuating from one state to the other. Besides the incomparable 'I-know-not-what of surprise and strangeness [*je ne sais quoi de si surprenant & de si étrange*]' in its ever-changing *novelty* and the calm and tranquil *beauty* of its vast and smooth surface, we also read of the stormy sea, with its terrible noise, fury and confusion inspiring 'an I-know-not-what kind of horror accompanied with pleasure, and offer[ing] a spectacle which is equally terrible and pleasant [*tout cela inspire je ne sais quelle horrerur accompagnée de plaisir, & fait un spectacle également terrible & agréable*]'.[71] Its complex and strong emotion may remind us of Dennis's mountain experience, yet it also seems a peculiar and strong but single feeling, in which the 'terrible' and the 'pleasant' are simultaneous and equal. There is no indication of any oscillation or temporal succession between them. The 'peculiar dual character' in the *je-ne-sais-quoi* sublime, as opposed to Hepburn's mostly Kantian sublime, is only apparent, not real. It stems from the insufficiency of our language to express this experience. These phrases demonstrate, rather, that our language is unable to present, only to represent. In other words, they show an inevitable ambiguity of expression, but not the structure of the experience of the sublime. This is why Dennis also ends his mountain experience

70 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford, 1936), 43.

71 Dominique Bouhours, *Les Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène*, eds Bernard Beugnot & Gilles Declercq (Paris, 2003), 57.

account with reflections on the inadequacy of linguistic expression to this peculiar experience.

4 Wonderous sublime

In his inaugural lecture, Hepburn outlines three fields of wonder: there is 'general', philosophical wonder, the fundamental stimulus of philosophy and science (from Plato and Aristotle to Gabriel Marcel); he next cites 'a religiously toned wonder', a kind of substitute of the mystical and the numinous, still available to those who reject the 'traditional background of metaphysical beliefs' (this religious wonder can be directed to either particular things, events in nature, or to the 'sheer existence of a world at all'); the third is 'the aesthetic field', where wonder is the central concept of Christian, Platonic or Romantic artists – it is also dominant 'in theories of the sublime'.[72] Having acknowledged the wide range of diverse opinions concerning the objects of wonder and the proper attitude to it, Hepburn affirmed that his own conception combines these three: 'Undeniably wonder can stimulate a person to enquiry […], equally undeniably, wonder can also be highly valued as a form of human experience, overlapping with both the aesthetic and the religious'.[73] His main concern is to find some inexhaustibility for this wonder, that is, he wants to save it from the vulnerability of being accustomed or being known. In his interpretation, therefore, wonder cannot appear as a relative or fleeting experience: 'many of us are no more happy with the thought of the universal displaceability (even if only in principle) of wonder'.[74] Here he refers to Kant's distinction between *Verwunderung* and *Bewunderung*, that is, between ephemeral astonishment and steady wonderment, at §29 of the third *Critique*'s 'Analytic of the Sublime', and to the oft-cited passage from the conclusion of the second *Critique*, about the '*Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht*' raised from 'the starry heavens above and the moral law within.'[75] Then, relying on Kant, again, and Martin Heidegger, he develops the distinction between curiosity and wonder (or marvelling at, *thaumazein*[76]), saying that 'curiosity-knowledge is seen as a kind of possession […]. Wonder

72 Hepburn, 'Wonder', 131.
73 Ibid., 132.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 133.
76 Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus,* 155cd.

does not see its objects possessively: they remain "other" and unmastered. Wonder does dwell in its objects with rapt attentiveness.'[77]

In this closing section, having argued that intersections between the aesthetic and the religious have been inherent and inseparable elements of modern aesthetic experience from the outset, I would like briefly to show that it is not the case that wonder merely has an aesthetic aspect (among others), as Hepburn suggests, but rather that wonder, in Hepburn's sense, which I characterize as the 'wonderous sublime', is a genuinely aesthetic or aesthetic-religious phenomenon.[78] That is, the general conception of wonder cannot rightly be applied (and specified) to the aesthetic field, because this wonder itself originated as an aesthetic (or aesthetic-religious) invention in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, creating a new admiration before the sensible, visible world, before 'The Grand Theatre of the Universe'.[79] Simultaneously, it was considered as a spiritual look: the regard of the first

77 Hepburn, 'Wonder', 134.

78 It is telling that the distinction between *Verwunderung* and *Bewunderung*, which to Hepburn seems so enlightening, appears in an eminently aesthetic context of the third *Critique*. Moreover, Sherry rightly calls our attention also to Kant's pre-critical *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (1764) and claims that 'Kant associates wonder especially with the sublime: to be more specific, he says that the "noble sublime" arouses wonder, the "terrifying sublime" dread or melancholy, and the "splendid sublime" has a "beauty completely pervading a sublime plan".' Patrick Sherry, 'The Varieties of Wonder', *Philosophical Investigations*, 36 (2013), 340–54, 341.

79 This is the title chapter two of Gracián's allegorical novel, *El Criticón*, which I suggest is one of the main sources for Addison's metaphor of *theatrum mundi*: 'the whole Universe is a kind of Theatre filled with Objects that either raise in us Pleasure, Amusement or Admiration.' Addison, *The Spectator*, III, 453. Gracián's hero, Andrenio, who has lived in a cave before, now seeing the created world for the first time in proto-aesthetic wonder (explicitly linked to the privilege of Adam) may remind us of Addison's spectator of 'polite imagination' and his or her 'innocent pleasures'. Moreover, there is an interesting prototype of Andrenio's cave and his first reactions to the world outside the cave in his essay No. 465, in which Addison referred to Aristotle's lost treatise via Cicero's *De natura deorum*: 'should a Man live under Ground, and there converse with Works of Art and Mechanism, and should afterwards be brought up into the open Day, and see the several Glories of the Heav'n and Earth, he would immediately pronounce them the Works of such a Being as we define God to be.' Addison, *The Spectator*, IV, 144. When men from beneath the earth would first see 'the earth and the seas and the sky', they would realize 'the size and beauty' of these natural prospects, and (mostly) they would come to know their fixed eternal order as the clear proof of the existence of gods, cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum; Academica*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 215. There is a significant difference, however, between this sober and basically intellectual reaction which can establish a natural theology and Andrenio's astonishment and emotional-instinctive responses which result in a proto-aesthetic attunement to the created world.

man. This wonder comes from – or is in a sense identical with – that complex experience which was characterized in the early eighteenth century as sublime (great) or novel (uncommon), and its attraction owes a lot to the mysterious *je-ne-sais-quoi*. Hepburn was very close to grasping it in his early scholarly publications, especially in his reflections on the seventeenth-century tradition of the virility (fecundity, variety) of nature (Hakewill, Bacon, Ray, More, et al.). He dropped this line, however, picking up the thread only with Kant and Schiller in the late eighteenth century, when the paradigmatic model of the aesthetic was built on the *artistic* genius and *moral* significance of aesthetic education and no longer on nature and its aesthetic-spiritual experience. Hepburn's oft-cited Romantic authors already enjoyed a re-spiritualized nature by utilizing the Kantian language. In other words, when Hepburn begins to reflect on the neglected beauty of nature in contemporary aesthetic theories in the 1960s, he too does it through the prism of the philosophy of art that emerged in the late eighteenth century onwards, instead of returning to his seventeenth-century theologico-aesthetic topics of the 1950s. Later, in 1998, he writes:

> If we are […] concerned to identify an aesthetic attitude to nature which is indeed directly and unqualifiedly centred upon nature itself and does not smuggle in the human subject so as to mirror, or metaphysically (or mythologically) transfigure him, then, I think, by far the most likely candidate is *wonder*.[80]

This is very like the 'wonderous sublime' – the astonishingly great, the uncommon and the mysteriously alluring beautiful – as emerged in the late seventeenth century.

In his review of Philip Fisher's *Wonder*,[81] Hepburn remarks that 'Fisher's dominant concept of wonder […] is *dynamic*: it is the glad, exhilarating sense of insight newly attained, or of being on that enlivening "horizon" between the overfamiliar and the altogether ungraspable. It is to be in motion – in the exploration of a painting or a phenomenon of nature.'[82] But Hepburn wants to add other modes of wonder to this 'vivid description' – 'less dynamic, and more contemplative' ones, 'whether appreciatively attentive to nature's colours,

80 Hepburn, 'Nature Humanised: Nature Respected', 277.

81 Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

82 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Review of Philip Fisher's *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 40 (2000), 282–5, 284.

textures, forms, familiar as they are, yet renewably evocative of wonder; or to the mysterious fact of the sheer existence of a world, a cosmos, at all' which 'from time to time stun some of us with wonder', while it does not offer any new metaphysical insight.[83] If I wanted to apply Hepburn's distinction to the period of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, I could say that his criticism is an aesthetic, or more exactly a theologico-aesthetic one, because he seems to refer to the *substantive* meaning of novelty or wonder which was elaborated already by Addison, Richard Steele and Henry Grove, not only to the dynamic-relative meaning mostly exemplified in scientific discoveries. At the same, Hepburn's dynamic–contemplative distinction is a little bit misleading. For while the delight prominent in scientific discovery could be conceived as already included in aesthetic experience by Addison, George Berkeley and Francis Hutcheson and his followers, it was also commonplace that the providential aim of the pleasure of novelty is the scientific openness to the world. More importantly, Addison somehow appropriates even *to thaumazein* in the pleasures of the imagination, that is, in the *aesthetic* experience which is not less dynamic than scientific discovery. The paradigmatic models of the modern aesthetic experience always involved some kind of motion: exercise, walking, expatiation in space and time, experimenting. The 'gentle exercise' of the imagination can be dynamic and contemplative simultaneously. David B. Morris rightly emphasizes discussing *The Spectator* (No. 489 on how imagination is affected by 'the Sea or Ocean': there Addison 'is comparing two ways of knowing the Deity: through rational analysis and imaginative perception.'[84] Indeed, examining other essays, such as No. 393, which I have discussed above, it may seem imagination or the active mental disposition of cheerfulness can be still more significant – spiritually and pragmatically – than understanding. Hepburn sharply, and I think rightly, refuses Fisher's rather schematic and rigid dichotomy between the pleasing wonder of philosophy and the fearful sublime of religion: 'sublimity can itself involve delighter wondering astonishment […]. And a plausible account of religious development can make quite central the superseding of fear by awe and love'.[85] I would add to his criticism that vividness and dynamism are perfectly compatible with the more contemplative features of this experience.

83 Ibid.

84 David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lexington, Ky., 1972), 137.

85 Hepburn, 'Review of Philip Fisher's *Wonder*', 284.

In the newly emergent experience of aesthetics in the early eighteenth century, people could foretaste the heavenly bliss of future life and regain something of the original enjoyments of the fresh creation. The ancient charms of the created world could be felt again as 'innocent pleasures'. In one of the last and most beautiful essays of *The Spectator*, Grove, the nonconformist minister and theologian, inspired by Addison's 'Imagination' series, writes about the 'Force of Novelty', saying that this love in human beings has been adapted to our present (metaphysical) state as a kind of insatiable appetite (this would be the 'superficial' level[86] for Hepburn). Its prefiguration, however, is that perpetual employment with which 'the Blessed' search into nature, and:

> to Eternity advance into the fathomless Depths of the Divine Perfections. […] After an Acquaintance of many thousand Years with the Works of God, the Beauty and Magnificence of the Creation fills them with the same pleasing Wonder and profound Awe, which *Adam* felt himself seized with as he first opened his Eyes upon this glorious Scene…[87]

Only from this 'serious' level we can appreciate rightly the 'force of novelty', that is, the mysterious charm of wonder. Sherry is right: 'Ronald Hepburn suggests that wonder goes with humility, compassion and gentleness, and contrasts it with dread or a sardonic attitude.'[88] Which means, I suggest, that this Hepburnian wonder owes a lot to pre-Kantian theologico-aesthetic ideas.

Finally, I would like to offer an – artistic – example to illuminate an aspect of the experience of the wonder – of the wonderous sublime – which is available to us, and I hope that this example would not be against Hepburn's taste. Nowadays, if a celebrated concert pianist recites, say, Ludwig van Beethoven's

86 Cf. 'Occasions of wonder can, I think, be ranked on a scale from superficial to serious: the superficial depending simplistically upon the sudden and unexpected – quickly worn out; and the more serious presenting the familiar itself in renewably new lights and perspectives, and setting it against as background of mystery, from which it (and we ourselves) are perceived as emerging.' Hepburn, 'Review of Philip Fisher's *Wonder*', 284.

87 Addison, *The Spectator,* V, 140. Tellingly, this spiritual connotation completely disappears from Kant's famous lines on the 'ever new and increasing admiration': 'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration [*Bewunderung*] and awe [*Erfucht*], the oftener and more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.' Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis, 1956), 166.

88 Sherry, 'The Varieties of Wonder', 348; cf. Hepburn, 'Wonder', 144–6.

Für Elise as an encore, it is almost inevitable that the audience begins to laugh on first recognizing the tune, yet, having quickly realized that the pianist is not joking, they will then be able to listen to the performance in deep and astonished silence inasmuch as they have a great pianist capable of rendering even this 'worn-out' piece as newly born, to wonder at it, and to make the audience wonder at it too.[89] He or she can convey this now hackneyed piece with vitality and *spirit* – as the air (*pneuma*) was able to enter the 'pores' of 'the mighty mass', 'impregnating the whole' in Shaftesbury's long declamation to the Nature-Deity: 'both the sun and air conspiring, so animate this mother earth that, though ever breeding, her vigour is as great, her beauty as fresh and her looks as charming as if she newly came out of the forming hands of her creator.'[90] This spiritual-aesthetic interpretation of wonder was elaborated in the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries. Such wonder is not the surprise of the novel; rather it is the ever-renewal of the deeply familiar, the 'soul of sweet delight', or – as Hepburn writes in his article 'Aesthetic and Religious' – the disturbing and provoking power that can present 'familiar objects and scenes in a fresh, wonder-evoking light, and make us feel very much less at home or at ease with any of them.'[91] To recall Steele's wise observation: 'There is no life, but cheerful life'.[92] Both versions are inherently aesthetic in the modern sense of the word, and both bring the wonder of cheerful life: what we should 'taste and see' until our last moments.[93]

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89 This is also the case with other talented musicians, actors and actresses, dancers, etc. who interpret well-known, classical pieces in concert halls, theatres, opera-houses and art halls worldwide.

90 Lord Shaftesbury, 'The Moralists', 311.

91 Ronald W. Hepburn, 'Aesthetic and Religious: Boundaries, Overlaps and Intrusions' in idem, *The Reach of the Aesthetic: Collected Essays on Art and Nature* (Aldershot, 2001), 96–112, 110.

92 Addison, *The Spectator,* II, 65.

93 I am grateful to Peter Cheyne for improving the readability by finessing the language of this paper and for his lucid comments.