

# The Sublime and Kant's Aesthetic Ideas: Excess the Nexus? An Excess of Excess Even? Need the Idea of God Be Only an Aesthetic Idea? Or Not Even That?

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## Introduction

Perhaps the two most memorable ideas that are to be found in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), are those of the Sublime and of the Aesthetic Idea. Is there some 'organic' connection between them? In his 'Introduction' to the Oxford 'World's Classics' 1990 edition of Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* Adam Phillips very usefully remarks, "[F]or Burke and Kant the Sublime was a way of thinking about excess as the key to a new kind of subjectivity."<sup>1</sup> The notion explored in this article, and implicit in Phillips', though not spelled out by him, is that a) the sublime object which affects the besublimèd<sup>2</sup> subject does this by *excess*: the sublime object effects the feeling/intuition of sublimity in the human subject who encounters the affecting object. On the other hand, b) the Aesthetic Idea is an intuition requiring for its 'conceptualization' (apology quotes) an excess of concepts, an overplus of them which cannot be resolved into one, nor

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, edited with an introduction by Adam Phillips (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> The word 'besublimèd' is a back-formation from 'bewitched', 'bewildered', 'beguiled', and so on. The accent è is from blessèd, stressed è used in the English liturgy of the Roman Church, for example, the Blessèd Virgin Mary. Unlike French accents that are specific, the è or é will do either way, and are not specific; they do not alter the pronunciation of the vowel, they govern stress only. Besublimèd indicates that the visitor to the Alps is – in some way – overcome, changed *etc.*, if only briefly. It seems to me a useful word in its context. I have not found another, current, word that does the job.

into any higher order concept either. The person moved by the sublime object must rely on i) a congeries of concepts, ii) plus a crowd of associations in order to tell about it. Any concept will have a penumbra of associations: a congeries of concepts would generate a 'storm' of them. Kant is content with one 'given concept' and its cloud of associations. I opt for a congeries of concepts.

### **We Are Now at Home with Sublimes, and Excesses**

What Phillips calls 'a new subjectivity' is no longer 'new', and we are by now altogether familiar with it. The useful notion is that of *excess*. Kant in *The Critique of Judgement*<sup>3</sup> writing of aesthetic ideas says: "An *aesthetic idea* cannot become a cognition, because it is an *intuition* (of the imagination) for which an adequate concept can never be found".<sup>4</sup> Here there is excess in the intuition. The excess of Burke's and Kant's Sublimes can be instanced by the Alps – European or Antipodean – or the Grand Canyon. Something is first 'out there' in the – shared – world: then it is in the 'subjectivity' of the sufficiently sensitive traveller. The Kantian excess is in the intuition. For this intuition the understanding searches for an adequate concept in which it might be contained. There is no such concept available. The cases of excited sensibility are on par: *excesses*, a) of overwhelming phenomena, and b) of the intuitions had from these, which

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<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928 [1790]). In §49, pp.175ff side number 314 Kant claims for aesthetic ideas a kind of outreach beyond the Critical limits "because they at least strain after something lying out beyond the confines of experience". I would defend this despite the remarks in the final section of the present article which cast a chill over the outreach notion. The partial defence would be found in other remarks of Kant's own. For instance: "In a word, the aesthetic idea is a representation of the imagination, annexed to a given concept, with which, in the free employment of imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up, that no expression indicating a definite concept can be found for it – one which on that account allows a concept to be supplemented in thought by much that is indefinable in words, and the feeling of which quickens the cognitive faculties, and with language, as a mere thing of the letter, *binds up the spirit (soul) also*", p.179 side number 316. Emphasis added. The crux is "*much that is indefinable in words*". The intuition *had* is the intuition had. It is felt; and – on occasion – it "*binds up the spirit*". If all that one thought an intuition had as its point were its – endless – unpackings, one would be valuing explication and criticism of art, music and so on, above music and art themselves. That intuitions cannot always be 'verbalized' is well known. It was for a while thought that the point of a text was to be deconstructed. One now may return to the notion that it is there to be understood. Meaning is not forever deferred. It is to be dug out – and probably by different gold diggers, from different pits following the one seam of metal.

<sup>4</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 210 side number 342.

exceed the limit of any clear concept, and so must be dealt with by way of a mix of concepts. This mix is never, itself, reducible to any conceivable concept, or meta concept.

We have, then, a double, or triple *excess*: a) The 'overwhelming' phenomena produce, b) an intuition as of that which overwhelms. The intuition overwhelms – in turn – c): The system of concepts available to the person who has this intuition. His only – rational – response to b), the intuition, is to resort to a congeries of concepts and associations, penumbral ideas and so on, possibly incongruous with each other, and actually not amenable to any attempt to unify them: when any attempt at unification under a second-order, or meta concept is bound to fail. By 'double excess' we mean, (a) + (b). 'Triple excess' – (a+b) R(c) – would indicate, a) the excess of a dynamic or mathematical sublime, b) as experienced by a person of sensibility, who then (c) finds in his mind an intuition **exceeding** all or any available concepts. So: the only resort is to a mix of concepts – tenuous and unstable, probably:

(a→b) → (c<sup>n</sup> + associations<sup>n</sup> etc.)  
excess → yet more excess

Beauty involves idealizations, typicalities and 'central form': The Sublime is too big to grasp, the terror is felt, the mind cannot quite cope. The sublime is not feeling as opposed to intellect, it combines both.

In philosophical aesthetics idealization<sup>5</sup> is not Platonic. The story that Apelles used a number of good-looking young women as models for a Venus statue indicates that he was an Aristotelian, working from induction, not from insights into pure forms of Plato's kind. The sky-high Ideas were brought down to earth by Sir Joshua Reynolds whose interest, in the *Discourses*, in *central form* was again inductive: the typical, the splendid example of X was gained from experience and through *disegno*. Not from flights up towards the heavens, but by patient drawing from life. The eighteenth century was a time for exploration of the world and the human body. Botanical and medical drawings were all from life, even if the 'life' were a cut flower or a dead human.

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<sup>5</sup> There are now two – almost contrary – senses of *idealization* in current philosophy. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *As If: Idealization and Ideals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017). Appiah is usefully revising and reworking notions from Hans Vaihinger's *As If / Als Ob* (1911). This was translated into English by C.K. Ogden in 1924. See Appiah for the sense of 'idealization' that *as ifing* would entail, *passim*.

Curiously, the Dynamic Sublime may call less upon Aesthetic Ideas than does the Mathematical, where one makes 'an aesthetic estimate' of the blocks of stone in a pyramid, *etc.* Faced with storms, enormous waves, cliffs and so on in real life, or in a painting by Turner, Kant seems to offer one and one only thought, "I, as a rational and moral agent am superior to all that Nature can do". The reader must figure to himself whether in actual danger at sea she would remember *The Raft of the Medusa*, a Géricault: or in a moment of imagined danger, 'abseiling' a Bierstadt or a Clifford Still, remind himself of other items in the sublime genre. Or would a simple, "I am above Nature" do?

Our simple superiority to Nature can cash out as a raw realization. Or as a cooked one, confectioned in various – aesthetic – ways. Would a literary theorist about – almost – to plunge into a crevasse in a glacier say to himself, "At last the real, the distinguished *abîme*"? The answer to this joke-question is "yes". But iff the person, a bit too close to the rift in the ice, remembered Burke's essential qualification, "terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close",<sup>6</sup> then all would be well. The person on the glacier would take a few steps back. To fall into the sublime one does not fall right into real danger. What Burke would have said of our contemporary passion for extreme sports I am not sure. New Zealand's Southern Alps are sublime, is climbing them so too? As for bungee jumping, Burke would have, I suspect, found it too vulgar. Or a dangerous but not fatal equivalent of a public hanging, a spectacle popular in Burke's day.

If one concept will not do to unpack sublime intuitions, might a congeries of them do as I have suggested? Kant does not say this directly, but he does say "[The] aesthetic idea might, I think, be called an *inexponible* representation of the imagination". He goes on a little later to write "[S]ince the reduction of a representation of the imagination to concepts is equivalent to giving its *exponents*, the aesthetic idea may be called an *inexponible* representation".<sup>7</sup> One notes that Kant uses the word 'concepts'. We might try to unpack the aesthetic idea in – not a concept – but in a congeries of them. We might choose to call a very neat set of concepts, an 'almost-concept'. But it would have to be very neat. Essentially it would be an in-congruous congeries.

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<sup>6</sup> Burke, *Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 42.

<sup>7</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 212 side number 344.

### An Example

Writing of a work by the very distinguished glassmaker the late Klaus Zimmer<sup>8</sup> – a small sublime object – ‘Construction 32’ (1997), of some 14.5 x 25 centimetres, I found no explicit concepts, but suggestions – implanted by it in me or by me in it, I cannot quite decide – from Plato’s *Timaeus*<sup>9</sup> and Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Nausea*.<sup>10</sup> The top part of the Zimmer panel is geometric, and clear in colour – a dark blue sharp geometrical shape on a light blue ground, seems to be falling – into an ocean, or into ‘existence’? The bottom part of the composition is organic, and curdled; it is baroque pearl-ish with an almost metallic sheen. Neither the *Timaeus* nor *Nausea* can be reduced to a single concept. And if they were, it would, one supposes, be itself an in-congruous congeries. Nevertheless what I gave of Zimmer’s glass panel ‘Construction 32’<sup>11</sup> was: *a reading*. It was not *the reading*, because it is obvious that there is no such definitive thing possible. My reading has been useful, I have been told, to people who look at the photograph of the work. More by luck than by management, one pulled it off. Yet, Klaus Zimmer objected, “I have never read Sartre”. Works of abstract art can be rather like the double inkblots used by psychologists as a diagnostic tool. Their interpretation is as much about the observer as about the work of art.

One gets the whole of Zimmer’s glass panel in by linking a ‘general idea’ of the *Timaeus* to one in *Nausea*, fairly neatly. In Plato the Demiurge tries to make the world by infusing into something, it is not clear what, the five regular solids. A world made up of already-intelligible elements, the bet is, would be all intelligible, through and through. But as Plato – looking at the world as it is – writes, “the receptacle proved to be intransigent.”<sup>12</sup> It did not work, this regular-rational scheme of infusing the

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<sup>8</sup> Jenny Zimmer (ed.), *Klaus Zimmer: Glass Artist* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. H.D.P. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 65ff.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965). See the whole of ‘Six o’clock in the evening’.

<sup>11</sup> Zimmer, *Klaus Zimmer*, ‘Construction 32’ (1997) photograph, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup> The text of *Timaeus* 30<sup>b</sup>.52<sup>d</sup> - 53<sup>b</sup> may be translated “the Receptacle was recalcitrant”, that is it resisted the introduction of the regular solids which the Demiurge put into it. Had they been put into something willing to accept them, then these regular forms – already understood by the Greeks – would have resulted in an understandable World/Universe. Alas this did not come about. When I lectured at the University of Edinburgh in the 1970s Ronnie Hepburn gave me the class handouts and spelled out the Greek for me. A whole section of a course depended on the ‘recalcitrant’ translation. The notes and my Loeb edition are now lost. The nearest I have got is

unintelligible with the intelligible. The nearest Plato gets to the problem of evil in the *Timaeus* is: a world that is not rational through and through. (It is all much worse than that.) *Nausea* is about the sheer gratuitousness of being itself. "It's all too much, and we don't need it", might just, sum *Nausea* up. Existence, Being is unnecessary. It is mediocre – the autodidact – or somehow disgusting, as is the tree root in the crucial section of *Nausea*, "Six o'clock in the evening". The root is nauseating. Being is nauseating. This is too generalized to be convincing, as is the Scholastics' *omne ens est bonum*. One recalls Hamlet's all too familiar "To be or not to be..." uttered in an existential crisis, not in an Existentialist one. What Sartre is against is not *essences* – which do, or do not, not render a whole rational (which upset Plato) – but *existence* itself. However the difference is not too great. Existence comes not plain, but as possible essences *realized*. This is enough for the Common Reader; if not for Sartre for whom there are no essences – more or less. That is another story: one we will not go into here.<sup>13</sup>

There is an amiable-to-terrifying inner dizziness which aesthetic ideas have. Too much for the understanding, but, so, too little adequately to do justice to what is intuitively felt. There is no one concept that will match the intuition. A set of concepts may not cohere. One recalls Gerard Manley Hopkins:

Oh the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Holds them cheap  
May who ne'er hung there<sup>14</sup>

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Gerd van Riel's chapter 'Damascius', in Lloyd Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), which gives Professor Hepburn's favoured reading. This can be found under the heading 2.4 'Matter and Place: *Timaeus* 30<sup>a</sup>:52<sup>d</sup> - 53<sup>b</sup>' unfortunately there is no Greek or any construal and explication of what is, it seems, an ambiguous text.

<sup>13</sup> My account of how small things may be sublime is given in Zimmer, *Klaus Zimmer*, 'Sublimes of Light', pp. 160ff.

<sup>14</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, revised and enlarged by W.H. Gardner and N.H. Mackenzie (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem, 'No worse, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief' (p. 100, lines 9-10) contains the line "Comforter, where, where is your comforting?" and ends with one, at first reading disappointing, "Life death does end and each day dies with sleep." *Sleep* rather than Eternal Life as one might expect from a Jesuit. However, one is at once reminded that many Christian tombstones bear the legend 'Rest in Peace'. Even 'And may perpetual light shine upon them' in the Catholic prayer avoids any speculative giving of content to Salvation. It is useful to read poem 69 with poem 23 (p. 32) 'Nondum', which has as its epigraph "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself" (Isaiah 45:15). Hopkins was no untroubled believer. For the ungraspability of

These lines are apt if only because they catch at once the inexpressibility of a spiritual intuition of possible but ambiguous comfort, in a world without comfort. And they call up in us the cliffs, the vertiginous terrors of Alpine landscapes. All in the one metaphorical envelope. And it is of course necessary that 'meldings' – as I would call them – generally have to be in metaphors. Concepts felt to go together, but not perspicuously rational in their relationship are 'melds'. The language of Hopkins totters: "Oh the mind, mind has mountains." It unbalances in the doubling of 'the mind, mind...'. It is, also, what Burke would call "a sort of climbing or falling in miniature."<sup>15</sup>

Hopkins' 'the mind has mountains' is a clear and apt metaphor. It might be useful to sketch the resemblances and difference between *metaphors* and *aesthetic ideas*. Metaphors have been discussed since the beginnings of rhetoric. And they have much concerned philosophers; into all that I do not intend to go. One might simply view a metaphor as a device depending on resemblances, actual or plausibly-found resemblances (and, occasionally implausibly found) between a 'thing' (in some vague sense of 'thing') and its chosen metaphorical analog. An aesthetic idea, on the other hand, not being able to be conceptualized, but suggesting one or more concepts not able to be crammed into any higher-order concept, is itself analogous to: a mixed metaphor. Mixed metaphors are in rhetoric risible, vulgar, and so on. Any aesthetic idea entails a *mix* – possibly unstable – of notions, where the clarity of any one notion is impinged upon by its proximate others. It would follow that there is an analogy between mixed metaphors and – essentially-mixed – aesthetic ideas, where 'mix' becomes, a) of the essence, and so, b) non-pejorative. What is comical or vulgar in mixed metaphors is not so in aesthetic ideas. Mixed metaphors are incongruous: incongruity of concepts in the mix of aesthetic ideas is, a) inevitable; and b) as I have suggested above, essential. As an Irishman I can tolerate an 'Irish bull'. Such a one might even – seriously or in jest – take a bull to be its rather grander analog, an aesthetic idea. Try this as you read *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*.

The *excess* of the aesthetic intuition is not the excess of Mont Blanc, or of the *mer de glace*. But they can be likened. 'No concept, but

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his own inner anguish, felt of course, but plainly able to be conceptualized, Hopkins resorts to a metaphor of the Romantic-Alpine. Not Shelley on Mont Blanc, quite; but some alpine place.

<sup>15</sup> Burke, *Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 110.

inexorable' entails too many concepts, concepts whose congruity will always be problematic. The *excess* of the probably incongruous concepts can – as I say – be *likened* to the excess of the Grand Canyon; but the two are not identical. As far as I can see 'likened' is the best that can be done. However, it would explain how the sublime and the aesthetic idea tend to bleed into each other. How reaching for one, one may end up with both. An intuition caused by an overwhelming sublime 'object' could be unpacked only in overwhelming concepts. That is in a set of them which might turn out to be both apt and ill-assorted.

### **'Sublime'**

The general use of the word 'sublime' is wider than are Burke's or Kant's technical ones. This can lead to a kind of reversal. We may say that J.S. Bach's *Passions* are 'sublime' in a 'loose' way of speaking. Or in a tighter one – and here is the reversal – Bach's music does not cause any terror, of the Alpine or any other sort. Rather its order reconciles one to the awfulness of the Good Friday Gospels. It breathes – for a believer – the Resurrection. For the atheist it remains sublime – this in a sense which is more difficult to spell out, since tradition provides an atheist at the St Matthew Passion with no a-liturgical language. By a-liturgical one means 'no established set of terms' which could – as it were – replace the Gospel Text printed in German and English which the believer scans as the Passion is sung.

What is "unto the Greeks foolishness"<sup>16</sup> is sublimated in some sense by Bach's positive and ordered music. Or the Passion music may be listened to, without much reference to the text, as in itself, uplifting. If someone feels somehow elevated by Bach's music, 'uplifted' will do, by itself, as an avowal. However, we always hope for an avowal which can be somehow further expressed in words.

### **God's Predicates: Theology as Retro-Aesthetic? The Aesthetic Retro-Engineered?**

In the Christian tradition God is thought of/*thought of* as having all, or all positive, predicates. The one God is both just and merciful, and so on. This simultaneously-predicated 'God' here is like 'the Absolute', which has, and somehow unifies, all predicates. This is all very problematic in that we

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18.



cannot *think* this unity of predicates; we just land ourselves up at the end of a language game having to affirm it. Absolute Idealism and 'God-talk' share the problem of reconciling the possible-to-inevitable logical heterogeneity of 'Absolutely unified' predicates, or 'God-unified' ones. The unity is affirmable, but not able to be defined. So, it does not amount to much, this while being, as to trying, the best that we can do. The predicates are mixed, even, possibly, opposed. Their unity is problematic.

*The mystic or whomsoever has an intuition has that, but not the concepts in which to express it. The theologian has the concepts but – in most cases – not the, crucial, intuition in which they are united.* Mystics may – or may not – have experiences expressible in aesthetic ideas. Some mystics, after all, have been poets. The mystical *or* the aesthetic idea remains above ordinary conceptualisation.

If – *per impossibile* – one avowed an *intuition* – in a more or less Kantian sense – of God's (or the Absolute's) unity, this could be no better than an aesthetic intuition. 'Unpacked' it would work – as far as one can see – only as a congeries of concepts. The suggestion that Theology is 'aesthetic', that it is a theological *retrofit* is not too farfetched. First we have the in-congruous congeries of predicates of God taken from tradition, then – in the second place – we posit a unity. And we may, rashly, avow an intuition of this unity. This *intuition* – if had – might then unpack only as a set of heterogeneous concepts. Which is where we started out with: the usual and traditional list of God's predicates. Theology has sometimes been thought of as poetic – Matthew Arnold, George Santayana – but it may very well be aesthetic, not as 'impressive, awesome' and so on, but because some of its so-called concepts prove, on inspection, to be themselves aesthetic ideas. 'Ideas' yes. But clear enough to become dogmas? Unfortunately, no? Or: fortunately, yes?

There are two directly opposed views which may be taken of the Sublime: i) it may be a way into contemplative prayer, itself offering possible glimpses/'glimpses' of the numinous Itself. Or: ii) The sublime may be an Enlightenment substitute for God. Kant banished into unknowableness God, along with freedom and immortality. Kant read and improved on Burke's idea of the sublime. He might be thought to have let it fill the place of God? This when the *Deus absconditus* had been, by the Enlightenment, pushed further into obscurity than SHE had been before. You are free to choose i) or ii), or even to vacillate between them.

If my contention that the sublime issues in – if ideas at all – only aesthetic ones, there is a possibly unwelcome consequence. My suggestion is that the idea of God is and can be *only* an aesthetic one. The unification of God's predicates may be postulated, but we have no intuition *as of* it. My notion is not one to be welcomed in Catholic divinity schools. I would not be surprised to find it quite at home in some Protestant ones, indeed a notion there so well known as not to need to be commented on. In the *Critique of Judgement* Kant writes: "The poet essays the task of interpreting to sense the rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed hell, eternity, creation, *etc.*"<sup>17</sup>

However, as far as God is concerned, "All our knowledge of God is merely symbolical".<sup>18</sup> And of 'the Kingdom of the blessed', and so on, what we get is at best a high fiction, not knowledge. The symbolical is '*as if*'; the plus sign – + – is *as if* someone had said, 'Now add up!' And so on, for many other symbols.

There are no knockdown arguments in the Philosophy of Religion, and this is not intended as one. For a far more nuanced treatment of the question I suggest *The Divine Attributes* by Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosencrantz.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless Kant's First and Third *Critiques* remain as 'start-again' points in the history of philosophy, and if the notion of Aesthetic Ideas has consequences for Natural Theology then one needs to acknowledge this fact.

### **The Intuition of the most Important 'Nothing'**

There is a Catholic tradition of Nothingness-Mysticism called in one book on the subject *The Ascent to Nothingness*,<sup>20</sup> which is about the mystical experiences of St John of the Cross. God in this tradition would be –

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<sup>17</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 176 side number 314.

<sup>18</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 223 side number 353.

<sup>19</sup> Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosencrantz, *The Divine Attributes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Alex Kurian, *Ascent to Nothingness: The Ascent to God according to John of the Cross*, ed. Andrew Tulloch (London and Maynooth: St Paul's Publishing, 2001). There is a vast bibliography on John of the Cross. The book referred to here quotes as a half-title page the Sufi mystic Farid al-din 'Attar "ride the steed of *non-being* to the place where *nothing* is". This will do, for those of us who are not mystics, as a mystical injunction. But philosophy can cope, if at all, only barely with the apparent entification of no-thing. We may begin packing for a journey with a suitcase with nothing in it. If when it is in the end of a trip a trifle overfull, we might say "I wish that there had been a bit more *nothing* in it!" However, this would be only jocose-philosophical for, "I wish I had brought a larger suitcase!"

possibly – that curious nothing which nevertheless ‘noths’.<sup>21</sup> The mystical intuition could be either of the to-us-incomprehensible-unity-of-all-desirable-predicates. *Or*, it could be of God as pure Being – Necessary Being – not able to be apprehended because being comes to us with-and-in-predicate-packs. To think, or to intuit pure Being would be difficult-to-impossible to minds where Being is something like an Existential quantifier over a range of predicates. Without predicates indicated by Greek letters, itself simply empty, the upside down  $\exists$  asserts nothing. The expression ‘pure Being’ may get used in natural theology; the notion – however – is a less than perspicuous one. Scholastic philosophers ‘used’ – mentioned – Necessary Being, and one knows why. But ‘knowing why’ does not lead to any kind of intuition of Necessary Being.

**Necessary Being is Ungraspable Because too Full; Nothing is Ungraspable, because Nothing is of Itself Ungraspable, there Being Nothing to Grasp**

The mystical intuition of God as ‘Nothingness’ is utterly paradoxical. Nothingness is given a quasi-existential-quantifier insofar as someone *has it*, as an intuition of Nothing. The mystic is there; is Nothingness *there* in any sense of ‘there’? The mystic answers this question “Yes, Nothingness is there, just as much as I am or was”. Whether it has this quantifier – ‘in itself’ – content-as-non-content – may be unanswerable. The answer would be paradoxical at best. At most it would look contradictory. Nevertheless, the discourse persists and has its own status. Indeed, St John of the Cross was a Master of Negative-Mysticism. Itself understandably more difficult to communicate than a positive mysticism. And this, when positive mysticism is at the very edge – if that – of what can be communicated. Alex Kurian who wrote the book *Ascent to Nothingness* about St John of the Cross tells us something about the history of the word *nada* which is, in Spanish, ‘nothing’. This is the scheme of it:

*cosa nacida* = something born → *nada*, a positive.

*nada* negated → *nonada*; the ‘no’ is dropped

and *nonada* becomes *nada*, ‘nothing’.

This might seem an overripe case of ‘language speaking us’, but St John’s report of his mystical experience is St John speaking of what he – ‘saw’,

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Nothing noths’; one uses this as a blank counter. One is not confident that it is meaningful but uses it simply because it is current – if suspect – coin.

'had'? It is an assertion in language of something – where 'thing' is paradoxical – beyond language. All assertions in language – *pace* PoMo – are assertions beyond language. (Linguistics itself would be only a second-order language about first-order language – itself a given).

The Mystical experience of St Paul taken up into the third Heaven, 2 Corinthians 12:2-4,<sup>22</sup> the mystical vision of St Thomas Aquinas towards the end of his life, would have been verbalized as "Oh, all too much for me to recount". This is not satisfactory, but we see that it might have to do; but "Oh, it was all this Nothing" would really perplex. But it happens, the experience and so the avowal, of Nothing. Tradition has it that after his vision St Thomas said, "Compared to what I have seen all that I have written is mere straw". Asked if he would now burn his writings, he replied "Certainly not!" If you cannot rise up to Heaven as Thomas Aquinas did, you need his *Summa*, and the rest of the corpus, meanwhile.

Whether or not mystics can have intuitions of things which non-mystics have no intuitions of I am in no position to decide. Judgement is i) offensive, because mystics are not properly to be judged by non-mystics; ii) because in terms of all that one has said we non-mystics are unable to grasp or so to envisage the mystical intuition which may be being claimed. *Having a Mystical Experience is not a Replicable Experiment under Royal Society rules.*

That the intuition of the Unity of God's predicates or of the Absolute's is – to non-mystics – possible one must deny. The – impossible – intuition were it possible would be like an aesthetic idea. This *if* it could be had, which it seems it cannot be except for very few persons. What is interesting is that an 'intuition' of God as Nothingness would *not* be like an aesthetic idea because, Nothing having no predicates or qualities, there would be *nothing to unpack*. To the prosaic mind God-as-Nothingness would lack qualities, and further, have no need – even – for an existential quantifier. Quite the contrary: even though an existential quantifier without predicates after it is null already.

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<sup>22</sup> That was St Paul, although he speaks as of another. See Jerome Murphy O'Connor OP, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 320.

### **Another Nothing?**

Reading Benjamin Moser's *Why This World*, a biography of the Jewish-Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector,<sup>23</sup> I was startled to discover that there is a Jewish quasi-analogue to St John of the Cross, and his ascent to Nothing. To those who practice the *Cabbalah*:

The notion that God is nothing is... a cabbalistic commonplace: 'Creation out of nothing means to many mystics *Creation out of God*.' Read in this light Clarice's statement that, "above mankind is nothing else at all" acquires an unexpected subtlety. Not above mankind but inside mankind is 'the God', 'nothing else at all.' If God is nothing, God is also everything: 'Life.' This too is a Jewish definition: God is everything and nothing: the union of everything in the world and also its opposite.<sup>24</sup>

For someone not inside this language game, paradox piles upon paradox. Further, beside her being a difficult writer, Moser tells us that Clarice Lispector was a mystic. James Joyce in his later works was a difficult writer, but not a mystic. Grappling with Lispector's complex prose as prose, one may also be trying to construe the utterances of a mystic. But all this takes us well beyond the confines of the present article. At first sight *cabbalistic* nothing is not quite like whatever St John of the Cross experienced. However, we cannot go into the difference here. Have we two kinds of nothing? That seems counter intuitive: that nothing could have kinds at all. More probably we have two uses→senses of 'nothing'. That is all in another part of the forest from the Sublime and the Aesthetic Idea. Here it must suffice to say that it is easy to think of God as *nothing*, because positively to think of God we, as often as not, come up – baffled – with nothing to say. On the other hand, for a Mystic to *experience* God as *nothing* is for hir to have 'nothing' to say; but the experience has been *had*, if of Nothing. And St John managed to say at least something of Nothing, nevertheless.

### **Idealization vs Idealization**

Kwame Anthony Appiah's *As If: Idealization and Ideals*, to which I have referred above, polarizes 'Idealization': Apelles vs 'As If' and the idealizations which are germane to *as ifing*. One senses here an issue

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<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Moser, *Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Lispector was born in the Ukraine, and people found such a family name so odd to Portuguese-speaking ears they thought it might be a mere *nom de plume*; even that she might be a man.

<sup>24</sup> Moser, *Why This World*, p. 268.

tangential to the Aesthetic Idea notion. I must confess that I am as yet unclear about the precise relationship between Appiah's 'idealizations' and the usual aesthetic ones, and about the relationship between *as ifing* and aesthetic ideas. However, the following remarks may be interesting enough to be worth making. The Greeks had an array of gods, and Apelles could represent Venus as a beautiful young or youngish woman. Monotheism has one and only one God. The Jews and the Muslims forbid images of HIR. The problem arises in the Sistine Chapel when one looks at Michelangelo's image of God as a strong old man in a nightshirt who, having just created the Universe, is putting life/soul into Adam by that famous trope of the two almost-touching fingers. Is this an Apelles-type Idealization, or an *As If* icon? Clearly it is an *As If*; even Apelles could not Idealize SHe who is 'from everlasting to everlasting' as he could a Venus.

What of theologies? Run the three Abrahamic systems, singly, or as interweavings – which to an extent they are – and you get *As If*. This since no one, nor all three can give you a state description of God. I have always enjoyed looking at the spines of books on the 'Systematic Theology' shelves of any Divinity Library, especially in oecumenical institutions such as the one here in Melbourne. 'Systematic'? At best we have a job-lot of would-be consistent systems, each and all *as-ifing* and no more conceptualizing their – absent – Referent with any more success than does an aesthetic idea.

Vaihinger in his *As If* (1911) knew how *as-ifs* in the hard sciences could ideally morph into scientific descriptions which might very well hold-up as eventual solutions to real questions in science if it were not a rule in science that 'solutions' are at best *pro tem*. *As If* – simple models of X – might solidify after research into respectable systems. *As Ifs* outside science might make no progress at all. Who invented the *As If*? Hans Vaihinger? I have an earlier candidate: Blaise Pascal, with his wager 'act *as if* you were a professing Roman Catholic, of a Port Royal sort, and it might very well pay off, and that in the end, handsomely.

### **Where are we Now with Intuitions 'Issuing' in Aesthetic Ideas?**

The article has moved, it would seem, a long way from the melding/bleeding of the sublime 'object' intuited and the aesthetic idea into a possible 'one'. The aesthetic idea involves for Kant a prior *intuition*, and we have got no doubts about the possibility of certain intuitions. Without an *intuition* there is no inexorable set of predicates/concepts and

associations into which one may attempt to unpack it, because the project of unpacking does not arise. With an intuition of an ineffable X the unpacking process is: a) proper; b) haunted by the – possible – mutual incompatibility of the concepts used in the unpacking; and iii) this unpacking is potentially interminable. Or, of an intuition one might say ‘I have it’, and then be forced to fall silent. The ‘it’ would remain unspecified, and incommunicable. This would possibly seem to be the case in at least some ordinary aesthetic contexts, and in super-ordinary retro-theological ones, rather often the case.

### ***The Sublime and Knowledge***

To return to the ordinary sublime, Phillips has another useful passage in his ‘Introduction’ to Burke’s *Essay on the Sublime*. Phillips writes:

“Knowing” is implicitly defined as the setting of limits and the “Sublime” as the impossibility of knowledge. So certain kinds of absence, which Burke calls privation are Sublime – vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence – all of which contain... the unpredictable –

To ‘the unpredictable’ we might add the *unpredicateable*, because predicates are consequent upon a prior *setting of limits*; red is not black, and so on. The passage continues:

the possibility of losing one’s way which is tantamount, Burke implies, to losing one’s coherence.<sup>25</sup>

The Sublime is or would be in itself incoherent if limits are the prior condition of knowledge. The Sublime is a negative to the mind, if in some sense a positive to feeling. And to ‘feeling’ which amounts to an intuition. The sublime and the aesthetic idea seem to be on a divide between coherence and incoherence, and to partake of both.

As a psychiatrist Phillips has seen a lot of radical loss of coherence in his patients. The sublime is a milder, more manageable case of this condition. The sensitive visitor to the Alps, or one listening to Beethoven’s Ninth or Mahler’s *Symphony of One Thousand* is besublimèd. This is healthy and enriching; the besublimèd has had his sensibility educated. Earlier *à propos* the Sublime Phillips has written: “classification is... threatened by *abundance*” (italic added).<sup>26</sup> The Sublime and the Aesthetic Idea are threats to classification and to concepts, because of their abundance. Their *excesses*.

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<sup>25</sup> Burke, *Sublime and Beautiful*, p. xxii.

<sup>26</sup> Burke, *Sublime and Beautiful*, p. xx.

It is the abundance of the Kantian aesthetic idea – inexorable – which already and of itself threatens classification. Concepts invoked in the unpacking will not submit to clear classification; too many of them, and not-all-together-coherent. Predications under the aesthetic idea will rarely be coherent; incoherence threatens from the beginning. It is an enjoyable incoherence. It is like – but *not* the same kind of thing as – the effect of too much champagne on the drinker, pleasant excitement with a trace of befuddlement. This, while the tone remains serious. The Sublime and the Aesthetic Ideas<sup>27</sup> of Kant face off against coherence, logic and – ordinary – knowledge. Yet they are not nothing: “Chateaubriand wrote of the spectator of the sublime Niagara Falls: “S/he beholds a sight where, ‘pleasure mingles with terror’.””<sup>28</sup>

**What is the ‘cash value’ of Aesthetic Ideas? How far do they reach *up*?  
*Down*?**

Towards the beginning of §49 of Book II, ‘Analytic of the Sublime’, side number 314ff we find a passage which we have cited a scrap of above:

The poet essays the task of interpreting to sense the rational ideas of invisible beings, the kingdom of the blessed, hell, eternity &c. Or again as to things of which examples occur in experience, e.g. death, envy all the vices, as also the love of fame and the like...<sup>29</sup>

The things after the ‘e.g.’ seem eminently expressing through and in Aesthetic Ideas, for ‘envy and all the vices’ see Ben Jonson, Alexander Pope, or choose your examples, for these and for ‘death and fame’. However, one wonders about ‘hell, eternity’ and so on. Is Kant giving Aesthetic Ideas *a special outreach-upreach-downreach*? What in William James’ sense would be the cash value of these *reaches*?

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<sup>27</sup> If Kant had taken up a Chair of Poetry he might have got there before the New Critics. He makes an impressive attempt at extracting something interesting from the fragment of poetry by Frederick the Great which he cites: Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p.178 side number 316. Kant makes something of a text at first sight rather unpromising.

<sup>28</sup> François-René de Chateaubriand, *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave: 1768-1800*. This is cited from a secondary source, ‘Noble Memories’, by Peter Brooks, reviewing a translation of the *Memoirs* by Alex Andriess in *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 65, no. 7, 19 April (2018), p. 39<sup>d</sup>. By chance I came upon this in a detective story: “The forest terrifies him still, just as it did when he spent long afternoons as a child watching his mother work [on her paintings] here. These days it is an adult terror, *a wistful feeling of mixed pleasure and pain*.” From Pierre Lemaitre, *Camille*, trans. Frank Wynne (London: MacLehose Press/Quercus, 2015), p.195 (italic added).

<sup>29</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 176.



Kant 'for the sake of brevity' confines himself to 'a few examples only'. In effect we get one only, or one and a half. I quote, at some length:

poetry and rhetoric... derive the soul that animates their works wholly from the aesthetic attributes of the objects – attributes which go hand in hand with the logical, and give the imagination an impetus to bring more thought into play in the matter, though in an undeveloped manner, than allows of being brought within the embrace of a concept, or, therefore, of being definitely formulated in language. – For the sake of brevity I must confine myself to a few examples only. When the great king expresses himself in one of his poems by saying:

Oui, finissons sans trouble, et mourons sans regrets,  
En laissant l'Univers comblé de nos bienfaits.  
Ainsi l'Astre du jour, au bout de sa carrière,  
Répand sur l'horizon une douce lumière,  
Et les derniers rayons qu'il dand dans les airs  
Sont les derniers soupirs qu'il donne à l'Univers;

he kindles in this way his rational idea of a cosmopolitan sentiment even at the close of life, with the help of an attribute which the imagination (in remembering all the pleasures of a fair summer's day that is over and gone – a memory of which pleasures is suggested by a serene evening) annexes to that representation, and which stirs up a crowd of sensations and secondary representations for which no expression can be found. On the other hand, even an intellectual concept may serve, conversely, as attribute for a representation of sense, and so animate the latter with the idea of the supersensible; but only by the aesthetic factor subjectively attaching to the consciousness of the supersensible being employed for the purpose. So, for example, a certain poet says in his description of a beautiful morning: 'The sun arose, as out of virtue rises peace.' The consciousness of virtue, even where we put ourselves only in thought in the position of a virtuous man, diffuses in the mind a multitude of sublime and tranquillizing feelings, and gives a boundless outlook into a happy future, such as no expression within the compass of a definite concept completely attains.<sup>30</sup>

This is a very good example of what was called in my youth 'practical criticism' or 'the New Criticism'. Kant shows how the little passage of poetry works; excellent. However, we get a piece of standard Enlightenment Humanism. There is no *upreach* or *downreach*; the reach is entirely *horizontal*. The Aesthetic Idea does not cross the Critical Gap, which Kant argued for in his first *Critique* between the known-and-available and the *noumenon* in the second 'Preface' to *The Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>31</sup> What we get is, for its time, a commonplace. If one had hoped

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<sup>30</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 179, side number 316.

<sup>31</sup> Kant at *Critique of Pure Reason* B27 does not convince. Choosing, or stipulating without argument, to write that what we live in is a world of *appearance*, so there must be an x – the-

that the Aesthetic Ideas were gazebos from which something beyond the everyday might be glimpsed, Kant's chief of his 1.5 examples disabuses us.

### **Single Concepts with Penumbras or a Congeries of Concepts with Penumbras All-Over?**

Without Kant's permission I have referred to the Aesthetic Idea as cashing out as *a congeries of concepts* in its unpacked state. I need to justify my 'congeries'. Kant writes:

the aesthetic ideas is a representation of the imagination annexed to *a given concept*, with which, in the free employment of imagination, such a multiplicity of partial representations are bound up, that no expression indicating *a definite concept* can be found for it...<sup>32</sup>

To come clean, when I suggested in that the Idea of God could only be an Aesthetic Idea I began with a congeries – in this one case at least. God in the diverse theologies of all religions has a) a number of 'obvious' (quote marks for shudder) predicates ascribed to HIR which; b) do not on the face of it seem compatible. Forgivingness and justice; omnibenevolence (despite the 'toleration' of evil deeds committed by humankind); providential power, (despite building earth out of tectonic plates which – foreseeably – would cause the Lisbon earthquake of 1755) and so on. Anyone can list *incompatible-pairs* of God's predicates whose *union* in God is stipulated. One might argue that the stipulation could be rationalized – if at all – only in an Idea which could – in some sense – contain, a) this excess of predicates, b) by giving us an *as if* insight to their unity in God.

My first notion was that Theology was Retro-Engineered from the Aesthetic, where 'Aesthetic' was short for 'Aesthetic Idea'. My second notion – now – is that not even an Aesthetic Idea would suffice. Why? Kant refers in the last passage of his *Critique of Judgement*, which one quoted above, to '*a given concept*'. The cramp – in effect a double-cramp – is that there may be *no given concept of God*, only a raft – or congeries – of concepts which one writes on the white-board around the word 'God'. That this "set", a) seemed to be able to be "unified" (doubt double quotes in all

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thing-in-itself – behind 'appearance' is a mere device. And a dubious one. This is a 'metaphysic' which pulls a pretend-rabbit out of an invisible hat. Since the thrust of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is anti-metaphysics it is odd that Kant starts off with a conjuring trick, and a very obvious one. Metaphysics – for all its faults – is usually not quite so easily seen through.

<sup>32</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 176.

cases) in an Aesthetic Idea was attractive, b) but this seems not to work, even this.

Dubious constructions of The Absolute – as in Bradley – can be built up. However, the Absolute, unifying ‘everything’ is to the mind which might wish to ‘behold’ it, a perfect blank. Difference rendered *indifferent* freezes the mind which is accustomed to understand the world of experience via a sorting out of different things. The Absolute is at bottom a paradox; the *absolute coherence* of the Absolute remains forever *incoherent* to minds unable to do without the principle of difference.

Nobody who believes in God, or would like to believe, could tolerate God as a *total blank*. The ‘concept’ of God is not constructed as is Bradley’s Absolute. It is postulated, but so postulated that it is an Other, to Whom predicates are ascribed, when this Other ‘comes before’. Its predicates; and is so Other, that its ‘concept’ is given only as – as Wittgenstein might have put it – *as a task*. The notion of God and HIR existence must be argued for, when this “notion of God” is always problematic, a) as a notion, b) requiring its ‘referent’ to be shown to exist. The problem goes, a) beyond the obvious, and, b) even beyond our ideas, even that the most elastic of them, Aesthetic Ideas. (Even Aquinas’ ‘Five ways’ to prove that God exists seem in our day weaker than they were in his.)

As Wittgenstein – almost – put it at the end of his *Tractatus*, ‘call in a mystic’. The cramp is then that what the mystic can tell/“tell” us can never be, clearly, stated: though Aesthetic Ideas may be part of the language of a mystic’s report of the experience of the Ultimate Other, they suggest something not definable in neat concepts. However, as we see from two mystical experiences – those of St Thomas and St John – for one saint God is  $\exists^n$  – existence to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree, absolutely. For another saint God is Nothing; one resists writing ‘absolutely’ here. The upshot might be to say, “God is beyond both *being* and *not being*”. That, however, is not really a remark about God. It simply marks the fix that we are in, given the mystics’ reports.

All of what we say about God is governed by the limits of our language, the limits of our world. God is, so, always other-wise, and elsewhere, except to saints and mystics, to the rest of us there are – moments. Moments only. God is the never-given, *or* the sometimes-given Excess. And well beyond the mere Sublimes. Or God is given as a Nothing, a Nothing which in some sense *is*. This although ‘*nothing*’ is used to mark

non-existence. 'God as Nothing is an existent'. This is – of course – not intended as an ontological remark, made in good faith – or in good Faith. It is, as I noted above, an indication of a linguistic fix – that is, it is a mystification of what we ordinarily say to which we are driven in this case. 'God is both *being* and *not-being*' is not an existential problem for God. It is simply a linguistic and, possibly, an existential problem for us.

To construe these sentences as an affirmation of a-Theism would be wrong in the extreme. They are about us and the twinges of our minds, as we speak the only language we have. Our language is never enough for this excess upon excess. One might be tempted to take the experiences of mystics as empirical examples, tending towards establishing some grounds for affirming the existence of God. However, St Thomas' experience would – one supposes – be 'evidence' that the Necessary Being exists. St John's would seem directly to contradict St Thomas'. One might make this point: Mystics recounting their experience are not provided by it with a higher language in which to recount it. Once mystical experience fades, they must speak – basically – the language which we all speak. I think this point to be neat, but not conclusive.

Buddhists have *experiences*, and some Christians who have learned some of the Buddhist, Taoist, and so on ways of meditation have 'equivalent' (quote marks for shudder) experiences. But 'equivalent' may equivocate; Buddhists have no God. Any 'Goddish' remarks, a) by Buddhists, or, b) by Christians who have succeeded in Buddhist or related mediation look odd. 'Western' God-claims following from, for example, a Taoist experience are not watertight proofs from experience. It is more than plausible to say that mystical experiences are always read through the particular experiencer's culture, theology, or other already-established belief-systems. And so on.

I would rather be wrong about this, but on the face of it, it seems to be the case. If one dropped 'God' and settled for a 'Something', the problem might vanish. Vanish only to force us to define and locate the 'Something'. Pantheism or panentheism offer a way out; but not quite the way out that I for one can be quite happy about. If one believes that there is something in all religions one may call that Something, 'The Indescribable'. The Greeks had an unknown god; have we an Unknown Indescribable, about whom we quarrel, despite it being the case that nobody's description is any better than anybody-else's? One is inclined to be a sceptical-liberal, in Theology/'Natural Theology'.

Aesthetic Ideas can deal with excess, but not with an excess of excess. The double excess is, in essence, a conjunction of two excesses of radically different types. The sublime is excess of experience which entails an excess of concepts. The Sublime is an experience. God is not generally experienced, so is not – in the usual way – a Sublime. However, SHe would, (a) exceed all concepts if experienced, and exceed  $\exists(x)$  and  $\sim(\exists)$  if and when experienced by mystics. For example, St Thomas and/or St John. Therein lies the difficulty, so theologies cannot take refuge – as seemed possible – in Aesthetic Ideas. The object of theology is both not given in ordinary experience, and not at home in the language which we have. Necessary Being can be mentioned but not thought. Nothing cannot be thought because there would be nothing to think. ‘The idea of nothing’ – at its extreme – would be both contentless, and totally Other.

### **Coda**

To think Absolute Being is beyond us. To attempt to think Absolute Nothing would be blocked by a kind of *cogito*; my thinking of nothing would be blocked by my thinking, which would be if not quite a ‘thing’ close enough to being one. The only real analogue of *Nothing* in experience would be dreamless slumber in which my being there to add one thing to nothing – and so spoil it – would not be an experience.

In a dreamless slumber I could not know, a) *nothing*, b) myself, c) myself confronting – if only in the thought – *nothing*. *Nothing* can, of course, be mentioned, it cannot be experienced; it would seem – too – to be unthinkable. Even to experience God as Nothing St John would have had to be in some way still *there*. Vacuity is a Sublime, but St John went beyond the Sublime. *Nothing* is as much an excess to thought as is *Absolute Being*. There are excesses beyond – even – the Sublime.

If the only ‘real analogue’ of *Nothing* is dreamless slumber in which the sleeping person *cannot* be aware of his state, then St John’s experience of God-as-Nothing would be as extreme, and so mystical, as an experience of Necessary Being. The crux of St John’s ‘vision’ (apology quotation marks) would be: an *awareness* of *as if* dreamless slumber. God would be revealing HisSelf as that which – short of a miracle (or... *find another word, reader*) – is impossible. This seems to make sense. However to call this *a positive experience of Nothing* is fairly obviously a linguistic cramp. ‘Positive’ and ‘Nothing’ are too ill-assorted for ‘a positive

## *The Sublime and Kant's Aesthetic Ideas*

experience of *Nothing*' to be a proper expression. Even in poetry it would grate. Perhaps we may put it thus:

- a) A person cannot be aware of his dreamless slumbers. Awareness of it could negate the dreamlessness.
- b) St John was aware of an *as if* dreamless slumber, *i.e.*, the High Analog of a dreamless slumber: God-as-Nothing.

*Nothing* has an existential analogue: *as if* dreamless slumber were somehow experienced in some way; the dreamer not absent as s/he is in 'I think of Nothing.' Necessary Being – despite having been endlessly referred to by Thomists – and others – lacks such an analogue. This point, as least as far as I know, has not generally been commented on. One might be tempted to say that *Nothing* is, so, more intelligible than Necessary Being. I – for now – resist that temptation. However, as an *arrière pensée*, I note that St John of the Cross may have seen God as the *urBeing* a *Being* before Being. This might resonate with if not fit into, 'Oriental', non 'Western' philosophies which postulate n/Nothing as the ground of Existence.

'Being before Being' is a locution which one would rather not use. It's too close to Plotinus and his One.<sup>33</sup> Were Aristotle still with us he would, I think, see modern Physics Newton-Einstein-Planck *etc* as *real* metaphysics, full of empirical content; much fuller than his own. What we now call 'metaphysics' is a kind of logico-poetic *façon de parler* useful for unriddling – as far as possible – bits of Theology. Theology has some empirical content, and a great deal of 'peradventure'. Metaphysics is very much 'peradventure' stuff. So, 'Being before Being' is an expression which one uses with, on one's face, the half-smile of a cynic. Cynics in their day were quite respectable. Or, as John Wisdom used to put it: "If you want to say *that*, say it with a smile!"

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<sup>33</sup> The One: This was a serious notion for Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who neglecting the drinkers' warning 'Never mix grain with grape' ended up somewhere between Kant (grain) and Schelling (sparkling grape) and ended with a philosophical hangover. See *Biographia Literaria*, Shawcross edition (reprinted lithographically 1907, 1967 (my copy), etc., p.188. This edition lacks, as does the earlier Everyman, the crucial footnote of Watson's edition (E II) where Greek of Synesius' Hymn has its last lines Englished: "... I have touched the One." By 1975 the notion that everyone could construe Greek had evaporated. "For this relief, much thanks..."