

Schwerpunkt: Das Tragische und das Erhabene

Schopenhauer on the Beautiful and the Sublime: A Qualitative or Gradual Distinction?

Bart Vandenabeele (Leuven)

When one tries to describe the exact relationship between the aesthetic feelings of the beautiful and the sublime in the philosophy of “Nietzsche’s educator”¹, many interpretation problems loom up. The main problem can be compared to a similar issue in Kant: if one agrees with Kant that the theory of the sublime is “a mere appendix to our aesthetic judging”², then it is possible to restrict the Kantian critique of the aesthetic appreciation to the Analytic of the judgment of taste – that is, if one neglects the subtle displacements and gaps in Kant’s text. In this way, as one can read in its introduction, the *Critique of Judgment* serves as the sought-after “bridge” between the theoretical and the practical, spanning the gulf previously created between the knowledge of objects according to the conditions of possible experience and the realisation of freedom under the unconditional of moral law. Moreover, if one notices that Schopenhauer too, in his aesthetics, stresses the fact that the feeling of the sublime “is distinguished from that of the beautiful only by the addition, namely the exaltation beyond the known hostile relation of the contemplated object to the will in general”³, “for in the main it is identical with the feeling of the beautiful”, then the option for a similar unifying and pacifying read-

¹See C. Janaway (Ed.), *Willing and Nothingness. Schopenhauer as Nietzsche’s Educator*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998. See also P. Granarolo, ‘Le maître qui permet à Nietzsche de devenir ce qu’il était’, in J. LeFranc (Ed.), *Schopenhauer*, Paris, L’Hermé, 1997, pp. 277-292.

²See I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 23, AA, p. 246: “einen bloßen Anhang zur ästhetischen Beurtheilung”.

³A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. I, p. 202 [288]. I will refer to Schopenhauer’s *magnum opus* by means of the abbreviation *WWV* [*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*], followed by the volume in Roman figures. The first page reference is to the English translation by E.F.J. Payne, New York, Dover, 1966. Between square brackets, the corresponding reference to the German text – edited by Wolfgang Ffhr. von Löhneysen, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989 – is given.

ing seems evident.⁴ We shall argue that things are far more complicated and that such a 'dialectical' interpretation is far from evident.

In the appendix to his *The world as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer had stressed – long before J.-F. Lyotard – the enormous importance of Kant's analysis of the sublime, when he wrote that "the theory of the sublime" is "by far the most excellent thing in the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*". That theory, Schopenhauer says, is even "incomparably more successful than that of the beautiful" and "gives not only, as that does, the general method of investigation, but also a part of the right way to it, so much so that, although it does not provide the real solution to the problem, it nevertheless touches on it very closely".⁵

The main difference between the sublime and the beautiful is that, while in the case of the latter, "pure knowledge has gained the upper hand without a struggle [...] and not even a recollection of the will remains", with the sublime, "that state of pure knowing is obtained first of all by a conscious and violent tearing away from the relations of the same object to the will which are recognised as unfavourable, by a free exaltation, accompanied by consciousness, beyond the will and the knowledge related to it".⁶ The objects can be hostile to the human will in general, the body, in two different ways: by their immensity or by their threatening power. Schopenhauer thus retains Kant's distinction between the mathematically and the dynamically sublime.

At first sight, the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime seems to be reduced to a passive, will-less and serene contemplation and a troublesome, violent and conscious elevation beyond that which threatens the will, respectively. The will-lessness and disinterestedness, two typical characteristics of the Schopenhauerian aesthetic spectator, seem to be absent from his account on the feeling of the sublime: Schopenhauer stresses the *activity* of the aesthetic subject in the sublime, that tears itself violently away from the relations of the object to the own will "by a free exaltation", which "must not only be won by consciousness, but also be maintained".⁷

The question is how such a conscious elevation can take place, if it is an elevation *beyond the will*. In what way can something that threatens or scares the will become the object of aesthetic contemplation, if one agrees with Schopenhauer that only the will can urge an organism to act, think or perceive? Even "in all abstract employment of the mind the will is also the ruler. According to its intentions, the will imparts direction to the employment of the mind, and also fixes the attention".⁸ This problem is less pressing in the context of the beautiful: the feeling of the beautiful is rather passive and poised and happens on the basis of the *Ent-*

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵WWV I, 532 [712].

⁶WWV I, 202 [287].

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸WWV II, 369 [476].

gegenkommen of the objects, which transform the willing subject without any resistance or struggle into a pure, will-less subject.

The change in the subject required for this, just because it consists in the elimination of all willing, cannot proceed from the will, and hence cannot be an arbitrary act of will, in other words, cannot rest with us. On the contrary, it springs only from a temporary preponderance of the intellect over the will, or, physiologically considered, from a strong excitation of the brain's perceptive activity, without any excitement of inclinations or emotions.⁹

Despite Schopenhauer's hesitant formulation, which rather surprisingly equals the will with a conscious and deliberate act of will (*Akt der Willkür*), he seems to be convinced that the change from willing individual to pure contemplative subject happens almost automatically and without problem in the beautiful, while that is definitely not the case in the feeling of the sublime. Why should it be impossible that something that does not happen on the basis of a conscious act of will, originates in the will? It would not be contradictory to claim in this case that the extraordinary activity of the brain (or the intellect) in aesthetic contemplation can only occur on the basis of an unconscious, *willing* activity, without the subject being able to interfere in this in a conscious way.

In the sublime, a purposive (*absichtlich*) turning away from that which threatens the will does take place. The feeling of the sublime emerges through the contrast of the meaninglessness and dependence of ourselves as a willing subject and the consciousness of ourselves as a pure subject of knowing. The importance of the spontaneous and free activity of the intellect can hardly be overestimated. As Paul Guyer rightly remarks, the question remains how this activity can be explained in terms of Schopenhauer's own philosophical system. That one actively wills to free oneself from his own will is, to say the least, rather paradoxical.¹⁰

Schopenhauer suggests, however, that there is a kind of purposiveness that is *not* produced by the will. He speaks of an aesthetic *self*, which is spontaneously and purposively operative in aesthetic reflection. Outside the context of aesthetics, the self and the will were put on one and the same level. On the basis of his postulate of the aesthetic will-lessness and the identification of the purposiveness with will, the acceptance of an aesthetic, hence will-less purposiveness (*Absichtlichkeit*) seems to

⁹WWV II, 367 [473-474].

¹⁰See P. Guyer, 'Pleasure and Knowledge in Schopenhauer's Aesthetics', in D. Jacquette (Ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 116: "Yet it seems difficult to understand such decisive mental acts except as at least in part products of the individual will. Thus there seems to be an air of paradox about Schopenhauer's account. It is not mere contemplation which passively frees us from our will; rather we actively will to contemplate in order to free ourselves from our will. Not that there is actually a logical contradiction in such an idea – one could, after all, inflict a great pain upon oneself now in order to be free of all pain later, or freely choose to enslave oneself now and thus lose all freedom later – but there does seem to be something unsettling about it". See also B. Neymeyr, *Ästhetische Autonomie als Abnormität. Kritische Analysen zu Schopenhauers Ästhetik im Horizont seiner Willensmetaphysik*, Berlin / New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1996, pp. 365-385.

be a *contradictio in adiecto*.¹¹ Still, Schopenhauer talks more than once about aesthetic knowledge that is ‘operative without purpose, hence will-less’¹² and he contends that aesthetic knowledge is connected with ‘pure intelligence, without aims and purposes’.¹³

Compared with the many remarks about an aesthetic will-lessness and ‘aimlessness’, the suggestions for an aesthetic *Absichtlichkeit* in the feeling of the sublime are rather marginal. The conception that the ‘will-free activity of the intellect’ is the condition for a pure objectivity is still irreconcilable with the requirement that the intellect turns itself away from the will and ‘emancipates itself from that service in order to be active on its own account’¹⁴, by being ‘detached from its root, the will, by its being free to move and being nevertheless active with the highest degree of energy’¹⁵ and ‘forgetful of its own origin, is freely active from its own force and elasticity’.¹⁶ How should one understand this autonomous elasticity within the framework of Schopenhauer’s theory of the dependence and even submissiveness of the intellect to the will?¹⁷ Aesthetic contemplation is founded on the unconscious activity of the will, but this coincides with a specific form of self-consciousness, which warns the *Gemüt* of the aesthetic character of the experienced state of consciousness.

How can Schopenhauer distinguish qualitatively between the beautiful and the sublime? This question has become more urgent due to the just signalled problems concerning the freedom of the intellect and the aesthetic *self*. Despite all his remarks on the dynamics and the violence with which the sublime feeling is necessarily connected¹⁸, a number of excerpts state that the aesthetic subject in the sublime ‘may quietly contemplate, as pure, will-less subject of knowing, those very objects so terrible to the will. He may comprehend only their Idea that is foreign to all relation, gladly linger over its contemplation, and consequently be elevated precisely in this way above himself, his person, his willing, and all willing.’¹⁹ The eventual result – the serene contemplation of the Platonic Idea – appears to be identical in the beautiful and the sublime. This hampers a wellfounded distinction between the

¹¹ See B. Neymeyr, *Ästhetische Autonomie als Abnormalität*, p. 371: “Auf der Basis von Schopenhauers Postulat ästhetischer Willenlosigkeit einerseits und der Zuordnung von Absicht zum Willen andererseits scheint die Annahme einer ästhetischen Absichtlichkeit also eine *contradictio in adiecto* zu implizieren”.

¹² See A. Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, Löhneysen edition, V, p. 494.

¹³ See A. Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena*, Löhneysen edition, V, p. 491.

¹⁴ WWV II, 386 [498].

¹⁵ WWV II, 374 [482].

¹⁶ WWV II, 388 [500].

¹⁷ For the intellect as the instrument of the will, see WWV I, 290 ff [400 ff]; II, 199-202 [257-259]; 214 [276]; 225 [291].

¹⁸ See WWV I, 202 [287]; 209 [296] and *passim*.

¹⁹ WWV I, 201 [287].

beautiful and the sublime.²⁰ In the case of the sublime, the violent elevation above that which threatens the will and its interests shall eventually result – just like in the beautiful – in the quiet contemplation of that which can be joyfully apprehended despite its hostile and perilous character.

This interpretation is dialectical (in the Hegelian, not in the Kantian sense): that which scares and threatens the will can be contemplated aesthetically on a higher level (so more intensely), by neutralising the negative affects and elevating oneself above them (*Erhebung*). What happens, is a kind of disassociation or depersonalisation. Although the subject has an experience of fear or even of terror it is not an emotion he regards as belonging to himself.²¹ Schopenhauer's theory of the sublime testifies to what Hans Blumenberg calls 'transcendental pride'²²: one enjoys its own independence, one finds pleasure in the fact that something that would destroy someone as a willing individual would not even appear if it weren't represented by the pure subject of knowing. Moreover, the difference between the beautiful and the sublime is often based on specific characteristics of the object. In the case of the beautiful, an object *invites* us to become an object of an aesthetic appreciation, whereas in the sublime the object becomes an *obstacle* through its unfavourable, hostile relations with the will of the subject. Schopenhauer wants to postpone a clear and straightforward definition of the aesthetic feelings.

The larger part of § 39 in *The World as Will and Representation* is devoted to concrete situations in which the transitions (*Übergänge*) from the beautiful to the sublime are sketched. With much feeling for drama, Schopenhauer sketches the gradual transitions from the beautiful to the feeble forms of the sublime and, eventually, the stronger examples of the feeling of the sublime:

Now if in the depth of winter, when the whole of nature is frozen and stiff, we see the rays of the setting sun reflected by masses of stone, where they illuminate without warming, and are thus favourable only to the purest kind of knowledge, not to the will, then contemplation of the beautiful effect of light on these masses moves us into the state of pure knowing, as all beauty does. Yet here, through the faint recollection of the lack of warmth from those rays, in other words, of the absence of the principle of life, a certain transcending of the interest of the will is required [...] precisely in this way we have a transition from the feeling of the beautiful to that of the sublime. It is the faintest trace of the sublime in the beautiful [*der schwächste Anhauch des Erhabenen am Schönen*].²³

²⁰See B. Neymeyr, *Ästhetische Autonomie als Abnormität*, p. 377: "Dem Erfordernis spezifischer und damit qualitativer Differenz zwischen den 'beiden Arten der ästhetischen Auffassung' wird auf diese Weise wohl schwerlich Genüge geleistet".

²¹See J. Young, *Willing and Unwilling. A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*, Dordrecht, Martinus Nijhoff, 1987, p. 90.

²²See H. Blumenberg, *Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer. Paradigma einer Daseinsmetapher*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1979, p. 58-69.

²³WWV I, 203 [289].

A very lonely and silent region, under a perfectly cloudless sky, without animals or human beings is "as it were a summons to seriousness, to contemplation, with complete emancipation from all willing and its cravings; but it is just this that gives to such a scene of mere solitude and profound peace a touch of the sublime [*einen Anstrich des Erhabenen*]"²⁴

But "let us imagine such a region denuded of plants and showing only bare rocks; the will is at once filled with alarm through the total absence of that which is organic and necessary for our subsistence. The desert takes on a fearful character; our mood becomes tragic".²⁵ As it demands more effort to raise oneself above the interests of the own will, the feeling of the sublime appears more intensely. Schopenhauer is often closer to Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime, than to Kant's. In his *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke connects the sublime feeling with 'anguish', 'terror', and 'privation'. In the above-quoted example, a feeling of silence and emptiness is evoked, that fills the willing individual with *terror*. Terror is, as Lyotard rightly remarks, closely related to *privation*.²⁶ The feeling of the sublime originates in deep terror or desolation, which is always, what Burke calls, a *violent emotion*. The sublime feeling is *delight* and not pleasure: it is "pleasure, which cannot exist without a relation, and that too a relation to pain".²⁷ The sublime delight is negative pleasure, "the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger".²⁸ It is pleasure, one can say, that is connected with the removal of pain or the escape from danger or threat. This is analogous to Schopenhauer's description of the feeling of the sublime as the feeling of the liberation from that which overwhelms or endangers the willing subject, although Schopenhauer does not mention Burke in this context.

Schopenhauer's examples of the stronger degrees of the sublime – the sublime is, it seems, contrary to Kant, more a question of intensification than of elevation – joins in with Burke's contention that "a mode of terror, or of pain, is always the cause of the sublime".²⁹ The clearest example of the (dynamically-)sublime in nature occurs, Schopenhauer maintains; "when we are abroad in the storm of tempestuous seas; mountainous waves rise and fall, are dashed violently against steep cliffs, and shoot their spray high into the air. The storm howls, the sea roars, the lightning flashes from black clouds, and thunder-claps drown the noise of storm and sea".³⁰ What makes this terrible terror enjoyable? According to Burke (and

²⁴WWV I, 203 [290].

²⁵WWV I, 204 [290].

²⁶See J.-F. Lyotard, 'Le sublime et l'avant-garde', in Idem, *L'inhumain. Causeries sur le temps*, Paris, Galilée, 1988, p. 110: "Or les terreurs sont liées à des privations: privation de la lumière, terreur des ténèbres; privation d'autrui, terreur de la solitude; privation du langage, terreur du silence; privation des objets, terreur du vide; privation de la vie, terreur de la mort".

²⁷E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992 (1757), p. 33.

²⁸E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 34.

²⁹E. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. 124.

³⁰WWV I, 204 [291].

Lyotard), this has to do with being deprived of the privation of light, life or language.³¹ Our personal need (*persönliche Bedrängnis*) cannot gain the upper hand: the clearest and strongest impression of the sublime lies in the twofold sensation of terror or pain and calm superiority at the same time: "Simultaneously, he feels himself as individual, as the feeble phenomenon of will, which the slightest touch of these forces can annihilate, helpless against powerful nature, dependent, abandoned to chance, a vanishing nothing in face of stupendous forces; and he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing [...] he himself is free from and foreign to, all willing and all needs, in the quiet comprehension of the Ideas. This is the full impression of the sublime".³²

When Schopenhauer speaks about a transition from the beautiful to the sublime in a description of a landscape, one may wonder in what way the specificity of the feeling of the sublime be guaranteed. Confronted with a desolate region, a certain elevation beyond the interest of the will is required, because the will cannot find any objects that can satisfy him. But this is not a question of a really hostile relationship to the will. Some examples point to the fact that Schopenhauer abandons the strict distinction between the beautiful and the sublime. This impression becomes even stronger, when we take into account Schopenhauer's remark, in the second volume of *The World as Will and Representation*, about the beneficent, soothing effect of the moon. "The moon is *sublime*", Schopenhauer believes, "it induces in us a sublime mood [*stimmt uns erhaben*], because, without any reference to us, it moves along eternally foreign to earthly life and activity, and sees everything, but takes part in nothing".³³ There is by no means a hostile relation to the individual will. On the contrary, the will with its needs and sorrow, "vanishes from consciousness, and leaves it behind as a purely knowing consciousness [*läßt es als ein rein erkennendes zurück*]"³⁴ A well founded distinction between beauty and sublimity seems impossible.³⁵ This levelling of the two aesthetic categories is linked with the Platonic inspiration of Schopenhauer's aesthetics: it stresses the cognitive importance of aesthetic perception. One should not, as is typical in most commentaries, overestimate this Platonic strand in Schopenhauer's aesthetics.³⁶ It is too far-fetched to leave no room for any differentiation between the beautiful and the sublime. In his hierarchy of the arts and especially in his interpretation of tragedy, Schopenhauer clearly acknowledges the importance of the distinction between

³¹ See J.-F. Lyotard, 'Le sublime et l'avant-garde', in *L'inhumain*, p. 105.

³² WWV I, 204-205 [291].

³³ WWV II, 374 [483].

³⁴ WWV II, 375 [483-484].

³⁵ See a.o. WWV II, 433 [556]; II, 449 [576-577]; HN I, 45; HN IV, 249.

³⁶ Typical examples of this overestimation are C. Janaway, 'Knowledge and Tranquility: Schopenhauer on the Value of Art', in D. Jacquette (Ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, pp. 39-61; C. Rosset, *L'esthétique de Schopenhauer*. Paris, PUF, 1969; B. Neymeyr, *Ästhetische Autonomie als Abnormität. Kritische Analysen zu Schopenhauers Ästhetik im Horizont seiner Willensmetaphysik*, Berlin / New York, De Gruyter, 1996. One had better keep in mind Bertrand Russell's remark in *History of Western Philosophy*. London, Routledge, 1996, p. 722: "He acknowledges three sources of his philosophy, Kant, Plato, and the Upanishads, but I do not think he owes as much to Plato as he thinks he does".

those aesthetic feelings. The *Widerständigkeit* – which is essential in the experience of the sublime – is irreconcilable with Schopenhauer's contention that the capacity of the objects to enhance the state of pure perception in the subject is parallel to the grade of beauty they reach. The sublime cannot be called extremely beautiful in this sense, as the sublime precisely hampers such an easy transition from willing subject to pure subject of knowing.

Schopenhauer seems to take a lot of trouble to minimise the modification in the subject prone to the feeling of the sublime. Why? When the violence and incommensurability is stressed, the architectonics of Schopenhauer's work is shaking. At the end of the third book, on aesthetics, of his *The World as Will and Representation*, he prepares a transition (*Übergang*) to the fourth one, the book on ethics, from a momentaneous liberation from the will to a permanent escape from it. If the harmony and will-lessness, promised in the feeling of the beautiful, turns out to be illusory, then a smooth transition from the aesthetic to the ethical domain becomes highly problematic. This is, however, just *the* problem, which emerges in the feeling of the sublime.

The serenity and harmony of the feeling of the beautiful, which holds the promise of a unified, will-less subject, has totally disappeared in the feeling of the sublime. It is, of course, still a question of exaltation above the will (*Erhebung über den Willen*)³⁷ and a feeling of purity. That is what renders it a purely *aesthetic* feeling. It does not form the particularity of the feeling of the sublime, though. When we acknowledge the importance of violence and ambivalence in the sublime feeling,³⁸ it cannot be maintained that the feeling of the sublime helps to fulfil the preparatory role of the beautiful in the perspective of the denial of the will. The sublime reveals the fundamental twofold nature (*Duplizität*) of the human consciousness in an ambivalent and painful way:

Then in the unmoved beholder of this scene the twofold nature of his consciousness reaches the highest distinctness. Simultaneously, he feels himself as individual, as the feeble phenomenon of will, which the slightest touch of these forces can annihilate, helpless against powerful nature, dependent, abandoned to chance, a vanishing nothing in face of stupendous forces; and he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing, who as the condition of every object is the supporter of this whole world.³⁹

The subject is confronted with something that completely overwhelms him – this is, as Nietzsche would say, the Dionysian – but at the same time manages to contemplate this in a serene, disinterested, 'Appolinian' way.

³⁷See WWV I, 201 [287]: "in the state of exaltation"; See also WWV I, 209 [296]: "free, conscious exaltation above the will".

³⁸See the frequent use of terms like *Gewalt*, *Widerstand*, *Bedrängnis*, *Kampf*, *Kontrast*, *Losreissung*, *Vernichtung*,... in WWV I, 200-207 [285-294].

³⁹WWV I, 204-205 [291].

There is more to it: ontologically speaking, the will struggles against the individual it has created itself. In this sense, the sublime is completely unnatural (*naturwidrig*). The sublime is an excessive feeling: either originating in a qualitative excess (dynamically sublime) or a quantitative excess (mathematically sublime). The subject is confronted with something that surpasses its imaginative power. Hence the transformation into a pure, will-less subjectivity, that knows how to turn this ravishing scene into an enjoyable picture. This subjectivity is *naturwidrig*: it is pure *objectivity* – a term which Nietzsche is to use again in his *The Birth of Tragedy*, which Schopenhauer identifies with genius and which borders on madness.⁴⁰ In the sublime the incessant battle between presenting and willing, between knowledge and drive, between the ideal and the empirical, or – in Nietzschean terms – between the Apollinian and the Dionysian.⁴¹ The individual will feels threatened and wants to turn away from the perilous and the immeasurable, but the contemplating faculty does not surrender. It tries and presents the unrepresentable. It pains itself to apprehend *that* it can apprehend. It is this terrible violence, that reveals the need to transcend individuality. Thus the excessive threat becomes the excess of presentation: the individual faculty of presentation reaches its limit and a desire for the boundless announces itself. This sounds almost perverted: one is threatened and scared to death (*bedroht und geängstigt*), humiliated and annihilated (*verkleinert und vernichtet*), and still one persists in his state of pure perception or contemplation.

The beautiful and the sublime can be interpreted as extremes on a gradual axis. This interpretation is explicitly supported by many passages in Schopenhauer's work.⁴² The beautiful as well as the sublime are felt by a 'pure' (transcendental) subject; in both cases the power to apprehend in a disinterested manner is enjoyed; in both cases the pleasure (*Wohlgefallen*) or joy (*Freude*) is accompanied by the contemplation of an Idea; in both cases, an exaltation above the will is demanded. The differences are essential, however. The beautiful is an Apollinian feeling of harmony, discipline and measure: the objects invite us to feel disinterested pleasure. The sublime, on the contrary, originates in a boundless and immoderate scene that threatens the individual will. The importance of this fundamental difference cannot be overestimated, whatever J. E. Atwell may say.⁴³

What is at stake, is the *life* of the individual. The throbbing heart of subjectivity itself, the will, is threatened to death. The moment at which consciousness tears

⁴⁰See WWV I, 188-194 [269-277] and II, 399-402 [514-519].

⁴¹See F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, London, Penguin, 1993, p. 26: "With sublime gestures he [Apollo, BV] reveals to us how the whole world of torment is necessary so that the individual can create the redeeming vision, and then, immersed in the contemplation of it, sit peacefully in his tossing boat amid the waves".

⁴²See a.o. WWV I, 203 [289]; WWV II, 374 [483]; WWV II, 433 [556]; WWV II, 449 [576-577], etc.

⁴³J.E. Atwell defends the view that the sublime is the extremely beautiful, and that both aesthetic feelings prepare for a complete liberation from willing (that is completed in ascetic renunciation). See his 'Art as Liberation: A Central Theme of Schopenhauer's Philosophy', in D. Jacquette (Ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, pp. 81-106.

itself loose is not just a detail but is exceptionally fundamental. In the sublime, the subject is attracted and rejected at the same time: as a willing subject it is ravished and withdraws, as a presenting subject it persists in its own activity. The gap in subjectivity is sublime. In this feeling of the sublime, the extremely paradoxical possibility is maintained to enjoy aesthetically of the deep gap that characterises consciousness. This is not to be confused with Nietzsche's concept of *Selbstentzweiung*; in Schopenhauer, no Dionysian loss of the self or violent auto-destruction is taken into consideration. According to Schopenhauer, there is a conscious subject divided between a passively experienced affection of the will and the active will-less contemplation: either one takes refuge or one wants to remain contemplative. On the other hand, the feeling of the sublime is no sensation or a series of sensations that can be reported to an *Ich denke*. Still, it is felt! Not as a lucid insight, not a feeling that can be enjoyed serenely as is the case in the beautiful. It is the felt 'presence', as Lyotard would say, of the incommensurability of subjectivity itself. It can only be felt *as the paradoxical and strenuous mixture of pleasure and pain which is the sublime*.

This (aesthetic) feeling can only occur, if the exaltation is "accompanied by a constant recollection of the will [*von einer steten Erinnerung an den Willen begleitet*],"⁴⁴ which contaminates the so called will-lessness, typical of the beautiful. So no *Erhabenheit*, as in Schiller for instance: the elevation above the will never succeeds completely. No room for happiness and harmony in the sublime. In this way, and this is crucial for a thorough understanding of Schopenhauer's philosophy,⁴⁵ it is rather the beautiful than the sublime that prepares a successful ethical escape from the torments of willing. The transition to the so-called quieter (of the will) is, in a way, easier from the beautiful – which is closer to the spiritual serenity of the saint – than from the restless and painful feeling of the sublime. The sublime is not a purely spiritual feeling, as it is essentially "accompanied by a constant recollection of the will of human willing in general, in so far as it is expressed universally through its objectivity, *the human body*".⁴⁶ In this way, an interpretation that considers the aesthetic and the artistic as a route to a kind of buddhistic liberation from all willing and suffering, is highly problematic.⁴⁷ The sublime functions as an aesthetic border crossing-point, that hampers a smooth passage to the realm of ethics.

This does not alter the fact that Schopenhauer's remark about the permanent recollection of the will in the sublime remains fairly enigmatic. It cannot mean that the individual will is affected; since if this happened we would end up in the con-

⁴⁴ WWV I, 202 [288].

⁴⁵ See my 'Wij wenen maar zijn niet gewond. Het sublieme gevoel in Schopenhauers esthetica', *Tydschrift voor Filosofie*, 61 (1999), pp. 663-695.

⁴⁶ WWV I, 202 [288]. (Italics mine.)

⁴⁷ I am thinking of, for example, D.W. Hamlyn, *Schopenhauer*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, p. 111 and *passim*; T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, pp. 162-163; A.L. Cothey, *The Nature of Art*, London, Routledge, 1992, p. 70-71; J.E. Atwell, 'Art as Liberation', in D. Jacques (Ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, 1996, pp. 81-106.

trary of the sublime: the *charming or attractive (das Reizende)*.⁴⁸ In the charming, one is merely passive and no really cognitive activity or purely aesthetic affection of the mind (*Gemüt*) takes place. The charming is sensual pleasure (*Genuß*) and no liking (*Wohlgefallen*) or joy (*Freude*). Every confusion or mixture on this level would destroy the particularity of the aesthetic. In the charming, the individual will is affected, because immediate satisfaction is being promised. This immediately disturbs the purity of the aesthetic feeling.⁴⁹ That every beautiful thing of a cheering nature is usually called charming or attractive is “due to a concept too widely comprehended through want of correct discrimination”, and Schopenhauer objects to it.⁵⁰ The charming or attractive “draws the beholder down from pure contemplation”, which is crucial to a purely aesthetic feeling, and thus he ‘becomes the needy and dependent subject of willing’.⁵¹ No such *Genuß* is present in the feeling of the sublime, but there is still the constant recollection of the will, or, rather, of human willing in general (*sondern an das menschliche Wollen überhaupt*).⁵² ‘If a single real act of will were to enter consciousness through actual personal affliction and danger from the object, the individual will, thus actually affected, would at once gain the upper hand [...] the impression of the sublime would be lost, because it had yielded to anxiety, in which the effort of the individual to save himself supplanted every other thought’.⁵³

What is the exact meaning and status of the *steten Erinnerung an den Willen*? It has to be remarked, first, that ‘recollection’ is closely connected to the aesthetic in Schopenhauer’s work:

it is also that blessedness of will-less perception which spreads so wonderful a charm over the past and the distant, and by a self-deception presents them to us in so flattering a light. For by conjuring up in our minds days long past spent in a distant place, it is only the objects recalled by our imagination [Phantasie], not the subject of will, that carried around its incurable sorrows with it as much then as it does now.⁵⁴

“We can withdraw from all suffering just as well through present as through distant objects”.⁵⁵ The same blessed will-lessness can be found in remembrances as in the aesthetic contemplation. Our memory is a form of self-deception (*Selbsttäuschung*): we imagine that reality was as pure and untouched by the will as

⁴⁸See WWV I, 207 [294]: “Since opposites throw light on each other, it may here be in place to remark that the real opposite of the sublime is something that is not at first sight recognized as such, namely the *charming or attractive*”.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰WWV I, 207 [295].

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²WWV I, 202 [288].

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴WWV I, 198 [283].

⁵⁵WWV, 199 [283].

is the image in our imagination now.⁵⁶ This, Schopenhauer argues, explains the wonderful flattering light which accompanies the images and the distant scenes flits across our minds “like a lost paradise”.⁵⁷

In the feeling of the sublime another kind of recollection takes place: it is a *constant* recollection – it lasts as long as the aesthetic perception continues. One notices here a remarkable sort of temporality: the aesthetic consciousness is, according to Schopenhauer, timeless after all. Aesthetic contemplation does not seem to take time and still a constant recollection takes place, which is clearly temporal. The will is present in the (will-less) consciousness, but it is not experienced as ‘being present at the moment’; it is ‘only’ a recollection and, hence, a product of our imagination. A constant oscillation takes place, which has far-reaching consequences for the interpretation of the sublime. This intricate issue can only be dealt with summarily.

First of all, if the fact that it is (only) a *recollection* is secondary, then the distinction between the sublime and the charming (the attractive) is blurred. If its status as *recollection* is subordinate, then there is no purely aesthetic feeling; every actual presence of the will disturbs the purity of the aesthetic feeling. That is the danger of Atwell’s interpretation of the sublime feeling. He contends that the will does not disappear as such, but that only ‘consciousness of the will disappears’.⁵⁸ How else, however, can a constant recollection of the will be interpreted than as a mode of consciousness?

But secondly, if it is unimportant that *the will* is present as recollection – so if *the presence of the will* in consciousness is accidental – the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful is blurred. In the feeling of the beautiful, the will is completely absent from consciousness, not even present as a faint memory! Something is beautiful, if it *invites* us to become the object of a disinterested contemplation and it is very beautiful, if it *forces* us to contemplate it aesthetically. In the sublime, however, “a constant recollection of human willing as such” occurs, which is difficult to grasp. A moment of displeasure cannot be absent and that pain remains there, so long as the aesthetic feeling remains. This aesthetic feeling should not take any time. All this is very enigmatic as it is. Schopenhauer wanted to avoid the Dionysian trap of ‘becoming a work of art’ that Nietzsche glorifies: the complete self-forgetness and total self-destruction by becoming one with the whole of reality.⁵⁹ In Schopenhauer’s aesthetics there can be no such thing, not even in the experience of music, since a kind of self-awareness – be it pleasurable or not – is the

⁵⁶On the importance of imagination in art and aesthetic contemplation, see C. Foster, ‘Ideas and Imagination. Schopenhauer on the Proper Foundation of Art’, in C. Janaway (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 213 -251.

⁵⁷WV I, 198 [283].

⁵⁸See J. E. Atwell, ‘Art as Liberation: A Central Theme of Schopenhauer’s Philosophy’, in D. Jacquette (Ed.), *Schopenhauer, Philosophy, and the Arts*, p. 100.

⁵⁹See F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 18: “Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: the artistic power of the whole of nature reveals itself to the supreme gratification of the primal Oneness amidst the paroxysms of intoxication”.

strict condition to speak about an *aesthetic* feeling. One should not, however, as J.E. Atwell seems to do, try and avoid the complexities of Schopenhauer's account by reducing the aesthetic and the ethical to the dichotomy 'liberation from the individual will / liberation from the noumenal will altogether'.⁶⁰

In the beautiful one feels, as it were, perfectly happy (*uns ist völlig wohl*): one feels liberated from the daily empirical interests, from ordinary satisfaction or delusions. It is the promise of pure inner blessed serenity and harmony. The feeling of the beautiful is in no way determined by an outer cause or external motif: a certain object or a certain representation can at the most be the *occasion* for the pleasure of the beautiful:

as long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throngs of desires with its constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we never obtain lasting happiness or peace but without peace and calm, true well-being is absolutely impossible.⁶¹

When, however,

an external cause or inward disposition suddenly raises us out of the endless stream of willing, and snatches knowledge from the thralldom of the will, the attention is now no longer directed to the motives of willing, but comprehends things free from their relation to the will. Thus it considers things without interest [...]: it is entirely given up to them in so far as they are merely representations, and not motives. Then all at once the peace, always sought but always escaping us on that first path of willing, comes to us of its own accord, and all is well with us.⁶²

Is this (promised) state of peace and happiness – *uns ist völlig wohl* – equally typical of the sublime? The feeling of the sublime is pleasure and displeasure at the same time. The feeling of the sublime is to be situated in the contrast, the tearing apart, heterogeneity, the fissure, the resistance and the differend; it is joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, exaltation and terror at the same time. It is paradoxical and thoroughly ambivalent. It cannot be identified with the feeling of immortality, as Julian Young thinks.⁶³ It cannot be considered as the harmonious feeling of the beautiful, in which one enjoys its own undisturbed serenity. The beautiful is cheer-

⁶⁰See J. E. Atwell, 'Art as Liberation: A Central Theme of Schopenhauer's Philosophy', in D. Jacquette (Ed.), p. 91: "I suggest then that contemplation is liberation from the individual will but not from will altogether (else contemplation would not be knowledge in which the will knows itself), while saintly resignation is liberation from the will altogether (thus from every trace of knowledge)".

⁶¹WWV I, 196 [280].

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³J. Young, *Willing and Unwilling. A Study in the Philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer*, p. 100: "The experience of the sublime is, we may say, an intimation of immortality, an experience which, as Kant puts it, makes us 'alive to the feeling of the supersensible side of our being'." This equalization of the intimation of immortality with the awareness of the super-sensible side of our being is highly disputable as such.

ful and serene. In the sublime this happy quietness and cheerfulness is permanently threatened by the constant recollection of the will, that causes deep pain and violent emotion.