

THE DISCOURSES OF THE SECULAR SUBLIME AND THE  
CONCEPTS OF THE NUMINOUS AND *MYSTERIUM*  
*TREMENDUM* IN THE WORK OF RUDOLF OTTO

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# The Discourses of the Secular Sublime and the Concepts of the Numinous and *Mysterium Tremendum* in the Work of Rudolf Otto

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## Abstract

This thesis explores historical and postmodern ideas of the sublime and the numinous, and finds similarities and differences between the two concepts. Consideration is given to notions of the sublime, from its appearance in Longinus's treatise *Peri Hypsous*, through to its historical development and reception by philosophers, theologians, and eighteenth-century theorists.

The thesis discusses how the sublime is conceived in contemporary thought. Alongside this concept, and in order to examine similarities and differences between that and the numinous, Rudolf Otto's work *Das Heilige* is used, in which the author argues for consideration of a non-rational element in religion and pleads for an original understanding of the holy. He shows how traditional representations of the deity lead to restrictions and limitations, and introduces his understanding of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* which, like the sublime, leads to awe and dread.

Further analysing the sublime, the thesis discusses critical theories presented by John Dennis, Joseph Addison, John Baillie, Immanuel Kant, and Edmund Burke. I show how Otto was influenced by these writers, and how Friedrich Schleiermacher's ideas on the essence of religion and the *sensus numinis* paved the way for Otto's thinking. Otto's understanding of the wholly other and its origins in the Hindu Upanishads is explored, and I explain how he distinguishes religion from anthropological and emotional morals.

Additionally, I show how Emily Brady uses language of the numinous when referring to being overwhelmed, an effect shared by the sublime. Finally, the thesis focuses on ways in which the sublime and the numinous manifest themselves in our contemporary world, in what Gavin Hopps calls 'a reawakened sense of mystery'. My original contribution to knowledge is that although the sublime and the numinous have similarities, they are distinct, and the sublime is a signpost towards the powerful concept of the numinous.

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## Introduction

My research is inspired by the overlapping concepts of the sublime and the numinous. The sublime, as I will go on to show, has a long history and has been well documented. The numinous, on the other hand, is a concept that has engaged theological thinkers in more recent times. However, while the two concepts have points of contact they are distinctive.

This thesis is an interdisciplinary contribution to the field of religious studies, drawing on aspects of philosophy, theology, aesthetics, literary criticism, and cultural theory. Philosophical and literary issues will be brought together in this interdisciplinary approach. The methodology I employ in order to research the discourses of the secular sublime and the concepts of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum* in the work of Rudolf Otto will involve the close examination of relevant texts relating to the key concepts. Due to the obscure nature of the phenomena, especially the numinous, I will not be seeking out individuals who may think they have had such experiences but will rely mainly on the writings of those who have made a particular and authoritative contribution to the field. I will also be considering the responses of certain theologians and philosophers in universities who have replied to my enquiries and questions on their understanding of the two concepts, employing their recommendations in the development of my work. A further means of exploring the concepts of the sublime and the numinous will involve the examination of relevant peer-reviewed journal articles.

The branches of knowledge I refer to above will be underpinned by the choices I make about what to study and whose writings to examine. For example, in respect of religious studies, the thesis will engage with Hebrew patriarchs and prophets, as well as with selected appropriate references from the Old and New Testaments. I will link Hebrew patriarchal and prophetic experiences with Rudolf Otto's idea of holiness and the concept of the *mysterium tremendum*, which will be traced in part via analysis of the original significant words in Greek and Hebrew texts. The thesis will be designed in such a way as to work, systematically, through the relevant texts from Longinus's treatise on the sublime through eighteenth-century theorists' work and contemporary writings, identifying sources for information, analysis, and literary criticism. As the thesis develops, I will consider the

philosophical and religious thinking of Immanuel Kant and also Friedrich Schleiermacher's influence on Otto. Later parts of the thesis engage with discussions of the sublime and the numinous in contemporary thought. I will now go on to explain the origins of the concepts of the sublime and the numinous.

The concept of the sublime first emerges in a treatise entitled *Peri Hypsous* (περι ψπσους), the date and authorship of which remain uncertain.<sup>1</sup> However, Timothy Costelloe shows that the work is 'routinely ascribed to the [Greek] author called Longinus, a rhetorician, literary scholar, and philosopher of the first or third century AD', and this thesis thus attributes the work to Longinus.<sup>2</sup> Following a translation of *Peri Hypsous* in 1674 by the French poet and critic Nicolas Despreaux Boileau (1636-1711), literary theorists began to take a serious interest in the concept, and the theoretical challenges it presents continue to stimulate debate in subject areas across the arts and humanities.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the sublime, the numinous and *mysterium tremendum* emerged in the writing of Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) with the publication of his work *Das Heilige* (1917), translated as *The Idea of the Holy*, which I describe below. Recent years have seen an upsurge in writings on the sublime and the numinous and a renewed interest in both of these concepts, as my literature review reveals.

The rationale for this thesis is twofold. First, the sublime is a concept, although not without its critics, which nominates itself as that which is capable of elevating the mind and reaching beyond the ordinary in life. The mystery it invokes captivates the imagination, demanding attention and continued explanation. Constituents of the sublime, which will receive greater attention in Chapter Two, are feelings of being uplifted, overwhelmed, and terrified. Second, this work highlights similarities and differences between the sublime and that which Rudolf Otto, in *Das Heilige*, calls the numinous and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and describes and explores the possibility of a theoretical affinity between the two concepts.<sup>4</sup> The sublime is largely a secular concept and the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* is a theological concept. Although the sublime has historically attracted more

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<sup>1</sup> The title περι ψπσους literally translates as 'On Sublimity'.

<sup>2</sup> Timothy M. Costelloe, ed., *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolas Despreaux Boileau will henceforth be referred to as Boileau.

<sup>4</sup> Trans. 'tremendous mystery that fascinates'.

attention than the numinous, especially because of the interest shown in the idea by eighteenth-century theorists, there are, nevertheless, references to the latter phenomenon in the writings of Aldous Huxley, Jacques Derrida, Melissa Raphael, and others.<sup>5</sup> The two concepts, although intrinsically different, hint at a relationship that invites a response. For these reasons, and in order to address and discover specific knowledge relating to these concepts, my thesis explores the impact of the sublime, from its initial revelation in the work of Longinus, through its development in the work of eighteenth-century literary critics, aestheticians, and philosophers to its current status as a key theoretical touchstone.

My evidence for experiences of the sacred leading to the numinous is informed mainly by Otto's works and also by the limited scholarly literature, particularly the work of Melissa Raphael. The specific focus of the thesis will be to discover if there are shared characteristics between the sublime and the numinous, what has been written about them, and how these concepts have impinged upon the minds of critical thinkers. I will explore texts that engage with the characteristics of the phenomena and show how they have influenced individual thinkers. As the thesis develops, I will set the scene more precisely in Chapter One by exploring the context of Otto's thought, particularly his ideas of the rational and non-rational. I will further define the sublime in Chapter Two, and consider the contributions of eighteenth-century theorists. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) had much to say on the sublime, and I explore his influence on Otto in Chapter Three. Kant's claims for the concept of reason, imagination, and understanding will also form part of Chapter Three. Chapter Four will include a discussion on Otto's engagement with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1843), and I will ask whether the former was influenced by the latter, and attempt to ascertain how Otto responded to Schleiermacher's understanding of the divine. Chapter Five will consider a path through the mundane from the transcendent to the immanent in both the sublime and the numinous. The responses of contemporary thinkers to the two concepts will be discussed in Chapter Six, along with arguments against the sublime. The chapter will also consider contemporary culture, which presents imaginary worlds and goes beyond the ordinary. My Conclusion will trace the ways in which the concepts of the sublime and the numinous have influenced secular and

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<sup>5</sup> For example, see David Jasper's (ed.) *The Interpretation of Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1986), which considers the *Sensus Numinis*.

theological thought and I will present my judgement on the extent to which they may be related. I will also make suggestions for future research relevant to the subject. I now go on to offer some brief definitions of the sublime and the numinous.

The term 'sublime', as found in the Oxford English Dictionary, originates from the Latin *sublimis*, meaning *sub* ('up to') and *limen* ('lintel'), literally the top part of a door, and so it refers to something that is 'set or raised aloft, high up'.<sup>6</sup> A further definition describes the sublime 'as having the quality of greatness, magnitude or intensity, whether physical, metaphysical, moral, aesthetic or spiritual that humankind is rendered incapable of perceiving or comprehending: words fail us; we are beyond the limits of reason'.<sup>7</sup> For Longinus, however, sublimity was initially conceived as a rhetorical term, the aim of which was to be of use to men in public life, helping them to develop their oratorical skills, and enabling them to move and persuade their listeners.<sup>8</sup> Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch refer to Quintilian's survey of Greek and Latin authors in his *Education of the Orator* (c. AD 95), which details the education system in the Roman Imperial period. In his work, Quintilian is concerned with the development of oratorical skills 'through the reading and imitation of the best writers', with Homer being seen as the model and inspiration 'for every department of eloquence'.<sup>9</sup> However, the term 'imitation' was used in a broad sense by Longinus and included divine inspiration such as that which empowers the priestess at Delphi to deliver her oracles.<sup>10</sup> Achieving sublimity, then, was shown in an orator's or writer's ability to amaze and transport an audience, overwhelming them with irresistible power.<sup>11</sup>

The Roman senator and historian Tacitus, in his *Dialogue on Orators* (c. AD 74), speaks of the pleasures of oratory, the delights of which are not confined to one particular moment but available daily:

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<sup>6</sup> Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble, eds., *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Tate Trustees, 'Art and the Sublime: Terror, Torment and Transcendence' (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. xlv.

<sup>10</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvi. See Chapter 13 of Quintilian's survey.

<sup>11</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvi.

think of [...] the show you make on the public scene; the adoration displayed in the courts; the luxury of rising and taking up your position, the spectators silent [...] think of the crowds ready to feel any emotion the orator may assume!<sup>12</sup>

While a sense of elevation takes place in the mind of an orator ready with his speech, the highest pleasure of all Tacitus reserves for the extemporary speaker: ‘daring and rash in his invention’.<sup>13</sup> The delights of the rhetorical sublime, of which Longinus had written, focused on the grand or elevated as aspects of language, while the true sublime he understood as having the power to ‘uplift our souls [...] filling us with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaulting joy just as though we had produced ourselves what we had heard’.<sup>14</sup> The rhetorical and the true sublime were then a shared pleasure of both the orator and his audience. Using the quotation below from Jonathan Swift, Murray and Dorsch show the importance for educated readers in the eighteenth century of Longinus’s treatise on the sublime.<sup>15</sup> An acquaintance with *Peri Hypsous* was clearly an advantage in literary circles of the time:

A forward critic often dupes us  
With sham quotations *Peri Hypsous* [*On the Sublime*]  
And if we have not read Longinus,  
Will magisterially outshine us.  
Then, lest with Greek he overrun ye,  
Procure the book for love or money,  
Translated from Boileau’s translation,  
And quote quotation on quotation.  
  
*Jonathan Swift; On Poetry: A Rhapsody* (271-80) (1733).

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<sup>12</sup> D. A. Russell and Michael Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xliv. The spelling of ‘*Hypsous*’ and all italics as in the original source.

Longinus's work was destined to be a major influence and starting point for aestheticians and philosophers in their wide-ranging debate on the sublime in nature, literature, and art, but its influence moved far beyond Longinus's text.<sup>16</sup> The art of rhetoric, on which Longinus based his writing, also included the art of writing and was classified under three styles of oratory: grand for arousing emotions, plain for setting out arguments, and intermediate for giving pleasure.<sup>17</sup> Longinus's subjects of 'height', 'grandeur', or 'sublimity' were not about the division of the three styles but rather to do with a specific way of writing, which he describes as the hallmark of great literature.<sup>18</sup> Longinus's work is addressed to one Terentianus, whom he refers to as a man of erudition, and he asks him to join him in considering whether his work will be of 'value to men in public life', in other words that it might be of some practical use.<sup>19</sup> The main thrust of Longinus's work, however, finds the sublime expressing itself through five sources of sublimity, which require as a foundation a 'command of language' without which nothing worthwhile can be achieved.<sup>20</sup>

Longinus finds the first source of sublimity to lie in grandeur of thought, this being the ability to form grand conceptions, a characteristic of natural greatness. The second source lies in having power to move the passions, which expresses itself in language that is capable of moving and affecting the emotions in both the speaker and the hearer.<sup>21</sup> The first two sources Longinus understands as innate, while the other three – 'effective use of stylistic and rhetorical figures as a means of increasing emotional impact', 'noble diction and phrasing', and 'dignified and elevated composition' – are a product of art and may be described in general terms as the ability to make use of and imitate great writers and poets of the past.<sup>22</sup> Further sources of sublimity Longinus lists as figures of thought and figures of speech, and these are evidenced in the effective use of stylistic and rhetorical figures as a means of increasing the emotional impact of literature. They are most effective when the fact that it is a figure is not obvious to the hearer or reader, when diction and phrasing

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<sup>16</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlv.

<sup>17</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlv.

<sup>18</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlv.

<sup>19</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 114.

<sup>20</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 121.

<sup>21</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvi.

<sup>22</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

are noble (including the skilful use of metaphors and other figures of speech), and when composition is dignified and elevated, which involves the effective arrangement of words and organic unity.<sup>23</sup> Sublimity, according to Longinus, is therefore a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse in literary language, found in the greatest poets and prose writers, which gives their work a lasting quality and establishes their superiority and fame.<sup>24</sup> For Longinus, grandeur produces ecstasy rather than persuasion in the hearer and the addition of wonder and astonishment proves superior to the merely pleasant and persuasive.<sup>25</sup> Persuasion, as that which can be controlled, seems to be less favourable to Longinus than the combination of wonder and amazement, since by its invincible power and force it can get the better of every hearer.<sup>26</sup>

In attempting to define the sublime, Longinus states ‘sublimity consists in a certain distinction or excellence of discourse’, and he goes on to add that it is from this source that the greatest poets and prose writers have acquired their pre-eminence.<sup>27</sup> Samuel Johnson, in his *A Dictionary of the English Language*, cites examples of the literary sublime and quotes the work of poets in his attempts to illustrate the concept.<sup>28</sup> Some of Johnson’s examples are to do with that which is aesthetically pleasing in poetry, as in Milton’s ‘my earthly strained to the height, in that celestial colloquy sublime’.<sup>29</sup> However, closest to Longinus’s view of the sublime is Johnson’s reference to Joseph Addison’s description of the concept: ‘the sublime rises from the nobleness of thoughts, the magnificence of the words, or the harmonious and lively turn of the phrase; the perfect sublime arises from all three together’.<sup>30</sup> Johnson’s definitions of the sublime show how reason and the imagination begin to come more to the fore in poetic writings.

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<sup>23</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

<sup>24</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 143.

<sup>25</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 143.

<sup>26</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 114.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds., *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 111.

<sup>29</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 111.

<sup>30</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 111.

Boileau's translation of *Peri Hypsous*, as I stated earlier, created fresh interest in the sublime, in rhetoric, and in art in a particular way.<sup>31</sup> Longinus understood true nobility in art and life to be found in confrontation with the threatening and unknown. He laid an emphasis on anything in art that challenges the human capacity to understand and was capable of filling with wonder.<sup>32</sup> It is arguable, though, whether one can experience true nobility in art and life without always having to experience the extreme challenges to understand, as described by Longinus. A less extreme example of sublimity, in contemporary life, may be found in the 'Floating World' exhibition of coloured woodcut prints displayed at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (2012). The exhibition depicts scenes from 'the pleasurable side of Japanese life' in the early nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Achieving sublimity, in this case, can be associated with the ability to relate the ethereal scenes of Japanese life with contemporary experiences in the life of the viewer. However, while the pleasures of early nineteenth-century Japan were experienced in a peaceful setting, the sublime is capable of disturbing the psyche, creating disorientation and presenting other intense experiences.

There was a change of context in the eighteenth century, when the word sublime began to reflect a new awareness of the limited nature of the self. Artists, writers, composers, and philosophers began to draw attention to extreme experiences that lay beyond conscious control and threatened individual autonomy.<sup>34</sup> Such thinking suggests a development in the concept of the sublime, and a shift from its position as a way of describing rhetoric to one that encompasses a wider range of experience, where human reason is challenged and signs begin to emerge of a relation between that and transcendence, and also that which Otto called the numinous. Simon Morley refers to the way in which Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe characterised the desire of philosophers to

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<sup>31</sup> Simon Morley, ed., *The Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art* (Whitechapel Gallery London and MIT Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 2010), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Morley, *The Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art*, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> Ryusai Shigeharu, Artist, 1820-1830; *Japanese Woodcut Prints* (Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery: Birmingham, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Morley, *The Sublime*, pp. 14-15.

explore the changes as ‘the incommensurability of the sensible with the metaphysical (the idea of God)’.<sup>35</sup>

There was an aspect of the sublime that would eventually become known as the ‘natural sublime’, which, as the literary critic Philip Shaw shows, was regarded by theorists of the natural sublime as a quality inherent in the external world.<sup>36</sup> This quality was identified by the dramatist and critic John Dennis (1658-1734), and as Shaw shows it ‘represented [...] a manifestation of the vastness, the power, and the terror of God’.<sup>37</sup> The writing of another early eighteenth-century critic, Joseph Addison (1672-1719), considered that ‘the underlying cause of greatness rests on the side of the naturally magnificent object’.<sup>38</sup> Shaw refers to Marjorie Hope Nicholson’s noteworthy comments on the problem that arises when distinguishing between two sublimes: the rhetorical and the natural.<sup>39</sup> Nicholson shows that critics have given priority, chronologically and qualitatively, to a rhetorical sublime that they elevate and understand as the Longinian sublime. However, in consideration of the natural sublime, that which exists in external nature is understood as ‘a degraded form of Longinianism [...] showing itself in an excessive emotion for natural objects in the external world’.<sup>40</sup> Yet while Longinus’s treatise places an emphasis on rhetorical sublimity, he also has something to say about sublimity in the natural world. As Yolton, Porter, and Rogers show:

Longinus hints that objects in nature, such as volcanoes, mighty rivers, and endless space are sublime, and our response to them witnesses to our natural love of grandeur and a desire to emulate or approach the divinity but he does not further discuss the natural sublime.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Morley, *The Sublime*, p. 15; parentheses in original source.

<sup>36</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>40</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> John W. Yolton, Roy Porter, and Pat Rogers, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 508.

Although Longinus's original conception of the sublime was as a rhetorical term, the Irish political theorist and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797) brought about a transition from rhetorical sublimity, and a shift from the natural sublime, to a notion of the sublime in which the focus falls on objects and evolves to a focus on internal states of astonishment, fear, and terror.<sup>42</sup> For the purpose of this thesis and in terms of the sublime, internal states may be defined, initially, as emotions that are a reaction to any threat or challenge to human reason. I shall examine the sources of the sublime for Burke as my work develops, but for now I can say that Burke understood the sublime to lie in qualities such as obscurity, power, vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence, and vastness, experienced mainly from a distance, and therefore conveying ideas of pain and terror without causing actual physical danger.<sup>43</sup>

As I mentioned above, Dennis and Addison sought some affiliation between the sublime and ideas of the divine, which suggests a desire on the part of these literary critics to find a secure and permanent place for the notion of the sublime. For Burke the sublime was associated with 'whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror'.<sup>44</sup> He further refers to the passion caused by the sublime in nature resulting in 'astonishment', a state of the soul leading to feelings of terror, dread, and fear and in which its motions are suspended with some degree of horror.<sup>45</sup> I will develop the concept of terror from Burke's point of view, along with the impact of awe, in Chapter Two of this thesis. Excessive emotion for natural objects later found fuller expression in aesthetics, especially in the writings of the Romantic poets, whose contribution to a sense of the sublime in nature I shall discuss briefly in Chapters Five and Six of this thesis.

While ideas of the sublime found expression in the language of fear and terror, I will go on to argue that some relation can be discerned between the sublime and that

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<sup>42</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ed. by Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> Yolton et al., *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment*, p. 508.

<sup>44</sup> Burke speaks of 'the great and sublime in nature, capable of inciting fear and terror in the human mind'. *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 36.

<sup>45</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 53.

which the German theologian Rudolf Otto named the numinous.<sup>46</sup> As will become apparent, defining the numinous is a difficult task. In *Das Heilige*, Otto describes having coined the word ‘numinous’ from a combination of the Latin *numen*, which means ‘God’, ‘deity’, and ‘power’, and the word *omen*.<sup>47</sup> Otto speaks of a ‘unique numinous category of value’ and of a definite ‘numinous’ state of mind.<sup>48</sup> He made a connection between the experiences of the sublime and *the mysterium tremendum et fascinans*,<sup>49</sup> which can be termed religious. As Otto attempts to articulate and explain the numinous, he finds the category of the sublime, while merely a pale reflection of the numinous and from the region of aesthetics, still to be a counterpart to the numinous.<sup>50</sup> As he writes:

No attempt of ours to describe this harmony of contrasts in the import of the *mysterium* can really succeed; but it may be adumbrated, as it were from a distance, by taking an analogy from a region belonging not to religion but to aesthetics. In the category and feeling of the *sublime* we have a counterpart to it although it is but a pale reflexion, and moreover involves difficulties of analysis all its own.<sup>51</sup>

Otto states that the sublime, like the numinous, is an idea or concept that ‘cannot be unfolded or explicated’, having in it something mysterious, and in this way it could be understood to resemble the religious aspect of the numinous.<sup>52</sup>

Otto creates an important distinction in relation to the concept of holiness, which although a category peculiar to the sphere of religion has, according to Otto, suffered by being transferred to another sphere, that of ethics.<sup>53</sup> He seeks to distinguish that which may be called ‘completely good’ or ‘of moral goodness’, terms used to describe people of a high moral or pious nature, from that which is the essence of deity: namely a quintessential holiness.<sup>54</sup> He further argues for a return to the original understanding of the word ‘holy’,

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<sup>46</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. by John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 6 -7.

<sup>48</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Trans. as ‘tremendous mystery that fascinates’.

<sup>50</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41. Spelling of reflexion as in original source.

<sup>52</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41.

<sup>53</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 6.

which is rendered in Hebrew as *קדוש* (*qadosh*)<sup>55</sup> meaning ‘pure’, ‘selected’, or ‘a consecrated thing’. In the language of New Testament Greek, it is expressed as *ἅγιος* (*hagios*), meaning ‘sacred’, ‘dedicated’, or ‘set apart for God’, and it also has the sense of religious awe.<sup>56</sup> As I will explain in Chapter Two, ‘awe’ is a familiar sensation evoked by the sublime. For Otto, religious awe can be described as a feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder and derives from the Old English *ege*, meaning ‘terror’, ‘dread’, or ‘awe’.<sup>57</sup> These are interpretations of holiness, but the holy can be distinguished as that which is separate from the profane. Awe, terror, and dread are inherent in Otto’s understanding of the numinous, which he sees as having aspects of *mysterium*, or that which is ‘hidden and esoteric, beyond conception or understanding, extra-ordinary and unfamiliar’, and *tremendum*, a concept derived from the word ‘tremor,’ meaning the familiar notion of fear and dread that relates to the Hebrew *קדוש* (*qadosh*), or ‘to hallow’.<sup>58</sup> Otto’s idea of *mysterium tremendum*, then, is traced via the Hebrew ‘to hallow’, or make holy, and connects with his thinking. It is explained as ‘keeping a thing holy in the heart’ and marking it off by a peculiar dread that is ‘not to be mistaken for any ordinary dread but to appraise it by the category of the numinous’.<sup>59</sup> A further aspect of the *mysterium tremendum* is its power to fascinate. By adding the words *et fascinans*,<sup>60</sup> Otto shows that while the numinous has elements of awe, fear, and dread, it is also capable of attracting and fascinating.<sup>61</sup>

In attempting to articulate what is meant by *mysterium tremendum*, Aldous Huxley provides a helpful analysis as he relates an experience he had under the influence of mescaline, a hallucinogenic and intoxicating compound present in the peyote cactus. Huxley describes an incident that filled him with fear and a sense of being overwhelmed under the pressure of what he calls a reality greater than his mind could bear.<sup>62</sup> Huxley understands this fear as being due to the incompatibility of humanity’s egotism and the

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<sup>55</sup> Trans. as ‘consecrated’. Karl Feyerabend, *Langenscheidt’s Hebrew-English Dictionary* (London: Methuen & Co., 1959).

<sup>56</sup> Trans. as ‘sacred dedicated to the gods’.

<sup>57</sup> Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>58</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 13.

<sup>59</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Trans. as ‘to fascinate’.

<sup>61</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 31.

<sup>62</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 33.

divine purity between humanity's self-aggravated separateness and the infinity of God.<sup>63</sup> This will have some significance for the ideas of the rational and non-rational of which Otto speaks, and which I shall develop in this work. The effect of what is known as the sublime and experiences of the numinous begin to overlap in examples of human experience, and at certain points some connection can be made between the two. However, it will be helpful to clarify how Otto seeks to define, more precisely, what in fact should be a proper understanding of the words 'holy' and 'sacred'.

Otto, in his desire to reclaim the religious understanding of the words holy and sacred, states: 'The fact is we have come to use the words "holy" [and] "sacred" (*heilig*) in an entirely derivative sense, quite different from that which they originally bore'.<sup>64</sup> In order to achieve what he sees as a proper understanding of the holy, Otto coined the word numinous.<sup>65</sup> There is an admission on Otto's part that although the numinous state of mind can be discussed, it cannot be strictly defined. It is also something that cannot be taught, as it can only be evoked and awakened in the mind since it comes 'of the spirit'.<sup>66</sup> Something of the like is suggested by Shaw in his conception of the sublime as 'something that the elevated individual instinctively knows: one does not learn the sublime; one catches it, like a divine contagion'.<sup>67</sup> I challenge the assumption that one can 'catch' the sublime, and question whether it is not simply an advanced stage in thinking, speaking, imagining, or experiencing through which one might arrive via the practice of aesthetics. However, the idea of 'divine contagion' is an extremely important one for my study and it can be associated with numinous encounters and transcendence, as will be discussed later in this introduction in reference to the Hebrew prophet, Isaiah. Otto's suggestion that the numinous is a state of mind that cannot be strictly defined nor taught, finds resonance with the sublime, the effects of which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, are 'crushing' or 'engulfing'. The sublime is something that cannot be resisted and is described by Shaw as that which 'marks the limits of reason and expression while at the same time giving a sense of what might lie beyond these limits' and further suggesting an

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<sup>63</sup> Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 6-7. Otto adopted a word from the Latin *numen* and added to that the word *omen* to form the word numinous.

<sup>66</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 13.

association with the transcendent.<sup>68</sup> The question of transcendence and sublimity is discussed by John Milbank, who finds transcendence to be ‘the absolutely unknowable void, upon whose brink we finite beings must dizzily hover’.<sup>69</sup> Milbank’s views on the transcendent will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Six.

In Otto’s thinking, an important aspect of an understanding of the numinous is bound up with and related to deeply felt religious feelings; early in his work he invites the reader to direct his or her mind to such a moment of intrinsically felt religious feeling, daring to suggest that the absence of such an experience would render the reader incapable of appreciating his discussion of religious psychology and suggesting that he or she read no further. This indicates just how strongly Otto felt about the need for religious experience and feeling when considering the concepts he examines.<sup>70</sup>

Commentators on the sublime have linked sublimity with notions of holy dread, and in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis I will provide a detailed and historical account of the treatment of religious awe/dread in the writings of eighteenth-century British theorists of the sublime. Such a discussion is relevant to my thesis since I am exploring connections between common effects of the *mysterium tremendum* and the sublime upon the human subject. For the present, and relating to emotions associated with awe/dread, I want to show how Otto disagreed with a theory put forward by Friedrich Schleiermacher, the German philosopher and theologian. Schleiermacher understood the essence of religion to be limited to a feeling of absolute dependence, and points to what he understands as an actively present numinous ‘moment’.<sup>71</sup> Otto offers an example of this from the Old Testament, where the Hebrew patriarch Abraham pleads with God for the men of Sodom, saying: ‘Behold now I have taken it upon me to speak to the Lord, which am but dust and ashes’.<sup>72</sup> In these words, Otto finds what he calls ‘creature consciousness’ or ‘creature feeling’, an emotion of a creature submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in

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<sup>68</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> John Milbank, ‘Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent’, in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, edited by Regina Schwartz (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 211-34.

<sup>70</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 9; Genesis 18. 27.

contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures, namely the deity.<sup>73</sup> This sense of being overwhelmed by a reality outside of the self, which Otto called the numinous, is experienced as a sense of holiness and dread.<sup>74</sup> This sense denotes a particular emotional response quite distinct from that of being afraid, as for Otto it is something set apart, worthy of its place in the category of the numinous.<sup>75</sup> Otto states that while complex, ‘the holy’ can be described as having a specific element or ‘moment’ that separates it from ‘the rational’.<sup>76</sup>

The British theologian, Adam Hood, has argued that feelings such as that of the numinous are integral to faith, and he notes the significance of Isaiah’s call to be a prophet, which was accompanied by an overwhelming experience of fear and awe.<sup>77</sup> In addition to these feelings, which Isaiah felt in the presence of holiness, he also became keenly aware of his personal uncleanness and impurity, and that of those among whom he lived. For Isaiah, there was an identification with the rest of his nation, and he experienced a corporate responsibility for their human condition and moral state. This can be linked with the aforementioned ‘divine contagion’, which causes the individual to be acutely aware of a sense of personal inadequacy in the face of an encounter with holiness. It might also be described as an awareness of sin in a moral sense, and an encounter with the *mysterium tremendum*. Isaiah’s response was: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!’<sup>78</sup>

Hood goes on to explain how Otto’s work created a connection between faith and fear with his term ‘numinous’:

So what is the nature of this feeling? To capture this feeling Otto coined the term ‘numinous’. The ancient Romans thought that there were *numina* or spirits all

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<sup>73</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Adam Hood, ‘Faith and Fear’, *Expository Times*, Vol. 115, Number 5 (2004), pp. 145-49.

<sup>78</sup> Isaiah 6. 5.

around them, present in brooks and streams, in mountains and homes; they were to be treated with awe and fear.<sup>79</sup>

The feeling is brought about by a ‘mysterious something’ as Hood shows, and it is this which not only leads to a sense of horror and dread but also ‘draws one to itself’.<sup>80</sup> Here Hood is discussing the *fascinans* element of the numinous, which both repels and attracts, and this is an idea that I will be discussing further in Chapter Five. The sublime also has the element of attraction and repulsion, as I will explore in Chapters Two and Five.

Just as in the experience of the sublime, which evoke a powerful sense of uncanny exclusivity, so in the description of the mysterious Otto writes of the ‘wholly other’. The wholly other can be understood as something beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar. Otto points to the Greek word θαμβος (*thambos*), meaning ‘to be amazed’ or ‘terrify’, as appropriate when referring to the terror associated with a numinous encounter and the likely mental reaction to this phenomenon.<sup>81</sup> Otto linked *et fascinans* to *mysterium tremendum* in order to express the compulsive nature of the numinous and its power to not only fill an individual with holy dread but to attract, fascinate, and draw the mind to itself at the same moment.<sup>82</sup> John D. Searle, writing on ‘An Accessible God’, discusses references to a Father-God in pagan religion and also in the Old Testament. He states that in Judaism it was only the Jewish High Priest who entered into the holiest place, the Holy of Holies, once a year on the Day of Atonement, suggesting a less ‘accessible’ God and concluding ‘it is right that we feel a sense of the numinous, the *mysterium tremendum*’.<sup>83</sup>

For Otto there is a point of resemblance between the sublime and the numinous, in that the former has within it something mysterious and exhibits the same peculiar dual character as the latter; it is at once daunting and yet singularly attractive in its ability to impress upon the mind. He speaks of the sublime as humbling us and at the same time exalting us, releasing in us a feeling analogous to fear while at the same time causing us to

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<sup>79</sup> Hood, ‘Faith and Fear’, *Expository Times*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>80</sup> Hood, ‘Faith and Fear’, *Expository Times*, p. 147.

<sup>81</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 40.

<sup>82</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41.

<sup>83</sup> John D. Searle, ‘An Accessible God’, *Expository Times*, Vol. 114, Number 9 (2003), pp. 307-09.

rejoice.<sup>84</sup> However, while the sublime is more readily understood to be of a secular nature, Otto sees it as capable of pointing towards the numinous, which has within it an element of the sacred, and for this reason the concept of the sublime is helpful in adding something to Otto's analysis of the numinous. As Otto states, 'the idea of the sublime is closely similar to that of the numinous, and is well adapted to excite it and to be excited by it, while each tends to pass over into the other'.<sup>85</sup>

Dennis sought to associate the sublime with the divine, as Shaw shows when considering Dennis's feeling of 'Admiration' for objects of Creation: 'Greater than nature, more powerful than mind, and ultimately inexpressible, the idea of God trumps all'.<sup>86</sup> Addison, as Shaw shows, also finds the source of human joy and happiness to lie in 'The Supreme Author of our Being', whom he understands as God, the one whom he sees as the origin and cause of delight.<sup>87</sup> Although Burke does not link the sublime with the sacred, he nevertheless makes a connection between religious feeling and the sublime in his section on obscurity.<sup>88</sup> He connects human passions, which can invoke terror and dread in the mind, with the practices of those who keep their religious idols in a dark and consecrated place for worship.<sup>89</sup> For Burke, John Milton's description of Death in *Paradise Lost* heightens the fear, terror, and dread that accompany death, the 'king of terrors', and finds in this religious work descriptions of death that are 'sublime to the last degree'.<sup>90</sup> Milton's depiction of Death will be explored more fully in Chapter Six.

Discussing the sublime, Otto states: 'The concept itself remains unexplicated; it has in it something mysterious, and in this it is like that of the numinous'.<sup>91</sup> Otto's thinking finds some support in Clayton Crockett's *A Theology of the Sublime* (2001), where, following the thinking of the religious historian Charles H. Long and the theologian Paul Tillich, Crockett suggests that a primary concern for theological reflection is the notion of orientation, in the ultimate sense, since it is concerned with the ultimate significance of

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<sup>84</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>85</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 42.

<sup>86</sup> Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 52.

<sup>87</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 55. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>88</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 54.

<sup>89</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 54.

<sup>90</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 55.

<sup>91</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41.

one's place in the world.<sup>92</sup> A distinction between the sublime and the numinous may be found in the complex question of human reason. The sublime, while challenging the mind with extremes of eloquence – of language, art, and nature – can usually remain within the realms of reason. The numinous, on the other hand, is more than likely to perplex the faculty of reason, so there are points of contact but essential differences between the two. There is also the important question of the rational and the irrational when considering phenomena in respect of the sublime and the numinous, and I shall go on to discuss these issues in greater depth as I examine Otto's ideas as my thesis unfolds.

The critic and theologian John Milbank refers to Longinus's use of the Biblical words from the Book of Genesis (Chapter 1 verse 3) – “Let there be light and there was light” – and Longinus's citing of them as a ‘sublime or elevated utterance’ that has some relation to classical rhetoric. Milbank brings together the concept of the sublime and the ‘transcendent [...] unrepresentable creator God’ and argues that whilst the sublime God was once the epitome of harmony and value, such eminence has now been replaced in modern and postmodern thinking by a substitution of sublimity for transcendence, leaving the transcendent to occupy the realm of ‘sheer unknowability [...], non-representability and non-depictability’.<sup>93</sup> Milbank's argument highlights the difficulty intrinsic in any attempt to speak of, or try to represent, the wholly other and make sense of numinous or transcendent encounters, as my earlier references to the experiences of Isaiah show.

Milbank suggests that the current fascination with the sublime has resulted in the undermining of the idea of the transcendent as the ‘absolutely unknowable void’ and has led to a usurpation of the transformative force of religious feeling.<sup>94</sup> He claims that the sublime was used to ‘re-articulate the conception of “divine height” of the most ultimate and primal reality imaginable’.<sup>95</sup> By re-articulate, I understand that Milbank, without naming names, is accusing those who advocate the notion of the sublime of undermining religion and of putting a secular, aesthetic concept in its place, a notion which I now go on to discuss.

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<sup>92</sup> Clayton Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 16.

<sup>93</sup> Milbank, ‘Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent’, p. 213.

<sup>94</sup> Milbank, ‘Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent’, p. 211.

<sup>95</sup> Milbank, ‘Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent’, p. 211.

Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, in their examination of the works of eighteenth-century writers on the sublime, write of the ‘great revolutions of the enlightenment’ and the changes that caused humankind to reassess its place in the ‘world outside and around him’.<sup>96</sup> Their claim, which they state is ‘dependent on models created in the eighteenth century’, shows that ‘we are, to all intents and purposes, children of the enlightenment’.<sup>97</sup> As an early child of the enlightenment, then, one of the first writers in England to take up the concept of the sublime was Dennis, who became a significant contributor to the discourse of the sublime.<sup>98</sup> Writing in 1693 in his *Miscellanies*, Dennis gives a description of a dangerous crossing of the Alps and speaks of the ‘delightful horror’ and ‘terrible joy’ of the experience.<sup>99</sup> In 1696, Dennis moves to writing of poetical genius and argues that what had hitherto been regarded as something supernatural and divine is no more than a common passion or a complication of common passions.<sup>100</sup> Dennis uses language that has become familiar when speaking of the sublime, including words such as ‘astonishment’, ‘amazed’, and ‘transported’, and speaks of the soul as exalted. However, he disagrees with Longinus that it is the image of ‘greatness of mind’ and understands such transportation as ‘well regulated pride’, which he suggests is a result of an over-inflated egotism.<sup>101</sup>

Other writers on the concept of the sublime in the eighteenth century include Joseph Addison, to whom I referred earlier, John Baillie (1741-1806), and Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713). Addison, writing in *The Spectator* between 1712 and 1714, explores the psychological effect of vastness on the imagination and considers those pleasures of the imagination that arise from viewing and surveying outward objects, which he believes proceed from what is great, uncommon, or beautiful.<sup>102</sup> Addison contrasts the greatness, novelty, or beauty of an object with the possibility that there may be something terrible, offensive, or loathsome attached to it that

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<sup>96</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 1.

<sup>97</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> Yolton et al., *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment*, p. 508.

<sup>99</sup> Yolton et al., *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment*, p. 508.

<sup>100</sup> Yolton et al., *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment*, p. 30.

<sup>101</sup> Yolton et al., *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment*, p. 30. ‘Well regulated’ is not hyphenated in the original source.

<sup>102</sup> Yolton et al., *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment*, p. 508.

detracts from the pleasure and yet can still produce a mixture of delight amid the very disgust it raises.<sup>103</sup> Addison's thinking bears some relation to that which I discussed earlier, when I mentioned the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* found in Otto's thinking on the numinous.

I have outlined in this Introduction how I am going to address my research on the discourses of the secular sublime and the concepts of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* in the work of Rudolf Otto. I have explained how I am going to carry out the research and have provided details, to some extent, on what others have said and written on the topic. The writings I have referred to attempt to address the mysteries of the concepts and relate closely to my research questions. The thesis will be of interest to anyone who seeks, seriously, to discover whether there is any relationship between the sublime and the numinous. My research advances the field of knowledge, relating to the concepts of the sublime and the numinous, by looking closely at the distinguishing features of both and finding that the sublime is a signpost towards the numinous, but not vice versa. The following is a brief review of previous studies in the field, and as such it describes relevant works that investigate the relations between sublimity and religion.

The introduction to Clayton Crockett's work, *A Theology of the Sublime*, tells us that the book is about Immanuel Kant and Paul Tillich. Crockett suggests that religion, in its existential sense, refers to a basic orientation to reality and acknowledges the desire of most theologians and scholars to help their readers make sense of their world with minimal disorientation.<sup>104</sup> Crockett speaks of Kant's point of view, which is that the sublime can be understood as that which 'disrupts orientation', linking Otto's 'Idea of the Holy' with the concept of the sublime.<sup>105</sup> Crockett, in his discussion of 'orientation' and 'disorientation', finds that 'what is defined as religious represents that which challenges our orientations and calls them into question in an unsettling way'.<sup>106</sup> In the case of the sublime and the numinous, there emerges a certain disorientation that may be attributed to the threat and challenge these concepts present to the reason. Crockett states that his book

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<sup>103</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 62.

<sup>104</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 17.

<sup>105</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 19.

<sup>106</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 17.

values ‘theological disorientation’ by taking seriously Kant’s ideas on the sublime, understood as that which is capable of disrupting orientation.<sup>107</sup> Crockett examines Kant’s discourse on orientation in thinking and the importance he places on reason as the ‘necessary means of orientation’, seeing it as the only means of ‘orienting human beings in the world’.<sup>108</sup> Crockett’s work is useful for my thesis because it raises the question of reason and disorientation in Kant’s thinking in respect of the sublime. Other areas of the work, especially Crockett’s examination of Milbank’s thinking, are illuminating and informative. However, the work is somewhat limited, since although its title mentions theology Crockett does not push his thinking more fully towards the numinous. Otto and the numinous get a mention, but only very briefly.

Ashfield and de Bolla, in their edited work *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, trace the history of the sublime through the works of Longinus, Burke, Dennis, Addison, and Baillie, among others. The eighteenth-century writers’ original essays and lectures, some of which appeared in the *Spectator* publication, are presented. For example, John Baillie’s *Essay on the Sublime* (1747) refers to Longinus’s treatise and the kind of writing that is of an ‘excellent and great manner, [...] peculiar to a genius: noble lofty, comprehensive’.<sup>109</sup> Baillie shows that Longinus did not confine himself to any one particular manner in writing, stating that some part of his treatise regards the figurative style, some the pathetic, and some what is properly called the sublime, and towards each Baillie directs his criticism.<sup>110</sup> Baillie creates a link between religion and the sublime as he refers to the ‘exalted sensations’ of the mind, which he relates to the deity. Ashfield and de Bolla’s work seeks to give a comprehensive and historical view of the sublime in the original works of noted theorists, and thus it informed my thesis. However, I disagree with Ashfield and de Bolla’s statement that discourse on the sublime should be seen as ‘technical discourse on the subject’.<sup>111</sup> The sublime, in its origins, was understood as very much to do with emotions, and so I think

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<sup>107</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 17.

<sup>108</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 17.

<sup>109</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 87.

<sup>110</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 87.

<sup>111</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p.6.

Ashfield and de Bolla's work would have benefitted from greater emphasis on that aspect of the concept.

John Milbank, in Regina Schwartz's *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature and Theology Approach the Beyond*, writes on 'Sublimity: the Modern Transcendent'. In this chapter, he attempts to show that Longinus's *Peri Hypsous* made a shift from its place as aesthetic theory to a notion of transcendence. Milbank goes on to make an attempt to bring together the concept of the sublime and the 'transcendent [...] unrepresentable creator God'.<sup>112</sup> Here Milbank is recognising the difficulty in holding on to a distinctive deity whose position is being usurped by the sublime. There is some contradiction in Milbank's thought since while he speaks of the sublime and its closeness to transcendence, he challenges notions that would place the sublime in the realm of the transcendent and above its station, so to speak. He offers a definition of the sublime that he states is, 'within representation, which nonetheless exceeds the possibility of representation'.<sup>113</sup> Milbank's challenging statement is significant because it suggests a dual nature for the sublime.

Timothy M. Costelloe's edited work, *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, initially focuses on the history of the sublime. Individual contributors offer essays on, for example, the Kantian sublime, the German sublime, the American sublime, and the Postmodern sublime. Part Two of the work focuses on the sublime in religion, fine arts, and architecture. Of significance for my thesis is the chapter on religion and the sublime by Andrew Chignell and Matthew C. Halteman, along with Melissa McBay Merritt's contribution, entitled 'The Moral Source of the Kantian Sublime'. Both of these essays are informative and challenging. Otto is mentioned briefly in other parts of the work.

Emily Brady's *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics and Nature*, was informative for aspects of my thesis. Brady explores the sublime both from an historical and a contemporary viewpoint, and she deals with the eighteenth-century sublime by developing her thinking around religious ideas while recognising, quite rightly in my opinion, that 'God [...] is not a driving force in the majority of theories of the

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<sup>112</sup> Milbank, 'Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent', p. 213.

<sup>113</sup> Milbank, 'Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent', p. 212.

sublime in the eighteenth-century'.<sup>114</sup> The Kantian sublime is discussed in some detail. An important point that Brady recognises, and with which I agree, is that the sublime, like the numinous, both attracts and repels, and this represents a significant connection between the two concepts.

Melissa Raphael's work, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, explores Otto's *Das Heilige*. Raphael examines Otto's contribution to the concept of holiness, holiness and morality, numinous experience, and holiness and liberation. She provides enlightening comments, which were of relevance to this thesis, particularly her discussion 'on the restrictions involved when dealing with sacred objects', as this finds a similarity with Old Testament ideas of distinguishing between the holy and the unclean.<sup>115</sup> Her section on numinous experience shows how Otto's theology 'begins and ends with presently available direct experience which is not dependent on texts or priests'.<sup>116</sup>

Robert Doran's *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* attempts to define Longinus's theory of sublimity, seeking out the five sources of the sublime and considering the sublime in nature and culture. Part Two works through Dennis's thoughts on terror and religion and moves to Burke's ideas on pleasure, pain, and delight. The section entitled 'Terror, Power and Religion' focuses on Burke's *Enquiry* and Kant's dynamically sublime, showing that Burke's section on 'Power' greatly influenced Kant, to the extent, as Doran suggests, that Kant's discussion of the dynamically sublime in his *Critique of Judgement* 'is the only section that discusses religion in any sustained manner'.<sup>117</sup> A large section of the work is devoted to the examination of Kant's ideas on the sublimity of the mind, and Doran later considers sublimity and culture in Kant. Doran's work informed my own ideas in respect of my chapter on Kant, as well as provided supplementary information on Burke and his idea of the divine. However, I disagree with Doran's statement that the 'mystical-religious experience' allows the

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<sup>114</sup> Emily Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 38.

<sup>115</sup> Melissa Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1997), pp. 50-51.

<sup>116</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 169.

<sup>117</sup> Robert Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime, from Longinus to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 164.

sublime ‘to function as a secular analog of religious transcendence’.<sup>118</sup> Such thinking is likely to dispense with the continued effort that is required to differentiate between the sublime and the numinous.

Finally, Philip Shaw’s comprehensive and detailed work, *The Sublime*, in its first and second editions, traces initially the history of the sublime before and after Longinus. Shaw examines, among other contributions to the development of sublime thought, eighteenth-century theorists’ approaches and Kant’s ‘Analytic of the Sublime’ before considering the postmodern sublime. Of particular use to my thesis is the section on ‘Early Modern Sublimity’, which links religion with the sublime and uses a number of examples from poetry and theology. Shaw mentions ‘contagion’, a concept that would benefit from development, especially in terms of the numinous. The chapter conclusions are helpful by giving succinct summaries of the main points discussed. The second edition of Shaw’s work acknowledges recent writings on the topic, with special reference to Costelloe’s collection of essays in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, and Doran’s *The Theory of the Sublime*, among others.

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<sup>118</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant*, p. 43.

## Chapter One

### Rudolf Otto and the Context of His Thought

I shall begin this chapter by trying to form a picture of Rudolf Otto and his academic life, in order to contextualise his thinking within the predominating religious, cultural, and political atmosphere of his time. Born in Peine near Hanover, Germany, in 1869, his initial education took place at the Gymnasium Andreanum in Hildesheim. He later attended the universities of Erlangen and Göttingen, receiving his doctorate from the latter with a thesis on Luther and a habilitation on Kant.<sup>119</sup> Otto became a theologian and religious scholar in the German Protestant tradition and developed an interest in the phenomenology of religion, an approach that concentrates on the study of religious consciousness and the objects of direct experience. As the phenomenology of religion was such a crucial part of Otto's thinking, it is useful to consider a brief explanation of the term 'phenomenon', which Malcolm L. Diamond describes as that which:

stresses the passive, receiving side of experience. It is rooted in the Greek word meaning 'appearance.' Roughly, a phenomenon is that which appears *before* it is worked over by checks that are consciously applied. If you see a roundish red thing coming at you, then this appearance as it is (before you start applying labels to it), is the phenomenon.<sup>120</sup>

A phenomenon, in its perfect sense, is therefore independent of analysis, which becomes a necessary requirement in order to bring it within the realms of human understanding and reason. The work of a phenomenologist is to explore that which allows a phenomenon to

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<sup>119</sup> I contacted the University of Göttingen (<http://www.sub.uni-gottingen.de>) and enquired whether they still possessed Otto's thesis, entitled "Geist und Word nach Luther" (trans. as "Spirit and Word in Luther"). The university informed me that Otto's thesis contained nothing on Kant but in defence of his doctor's thesis two documents exist: Thesis No. 15, "Kant's Moralitats-Princip ist in der That ein material's" (trans. as "Kant's Moral Principle is, in fact, material"), and Thesis No. 16, "Aberes ist leer, da es einen circulus vitiosus bildet" (trans. as "But it is empty in that it forms a vicious circle"). The university has no record of Otto's habilitation on Kant.

<sup>120</sup> Malcolm L. Diamond, *Contemporary Philosophy and Religious Thought: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), pp. 78-9.

be a phenomenon.<sup>121</sup> Diamond's thinking resonates with that of Wittgenstein who remarked: 'Don't think, but look!'<sup>122</sup> Wittgenstein's recommendation, then, suggests that receiving the experience of encounter with a phenomenon passively, rather than making any attempt to try immediately to engage intellectually, is to be preferred. Wittgenstein's thinking is thus about perception. However, encountering that which may be called a phenomenon, or indeed what may be called a sublime experience, by its very nature demands some intellectual response, if not immediately then very soon after the experience.

Otto's *mysterium tremendum*, a term I shall explain in detail later in this chapter, along with the numinous, may at first be received passively but it is certainly an intellectual challenge that seizes the imagination and continues to demand an answer. His belief that experience is the source of all knowledge prompted the German philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) to found the twentieth-century philosophical school of phenomenology. He worked on a method of phenomenological reduction through which a subject may come to know directly the essence of religion. However, such thinking is met with disdain by J. E. Barnhart, who regards it as being like the 'quest for the Holy Grail' and having 'run out of steam'.<sup>123</sup> Barnhart commends neo-phenomenologists who speak of 'structures' rather than 'essences' and who, in their exploration of 'social and behavioural sciences', move 'far beyond the purist Edmund Husserl'.<sup>124</sup>

Otto developed an interest in comparative religion and the history of religion. A brief outline of the beliefs put forward by the German Protestant tradition may help to explain Otto's religious background. The German Protestant tradition has three basic principles: (1) the belief that the Bible is the highest source of authority, surpassing church tradition; (2) a belief in justification by faith alone, which is understood as 'free grace' brought about by the sacrifice of Christ, and which leads to salvation; and (3) the universal priesthood of all believers, which claims that the Christian laity should have the right to

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<sup>121</sup> Michel Henry, 'Phenomenology of Life', in *Transcendence and Phenomenology*, edited by Peter M. Candler Jr. and Conor Cunningham (London: SCM Press, 2007), p. 241.

<sup>122</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), p. 31.

<sup>123</sup> J. E. Barnhart, *The Study of Religion and Its Meaning: New Explorations in Light of Karl Popper and Emile Durkheim* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1977), p. vii.

<sup>124</sup> Barnhart, *The Study of Religion and Its Meaning*, p. vii.

read the Bible in their own vernacular and also be involved in the work of governing the church.<sup>125</sup>

However, whilst these precepts formed Otto's background in religion, his deepest interests still lay in the phenomenology of religious consciousness, comparative religion, and the history of religion. He travelled to a variety of places between 1910 and 1911, and again between 1925 and 1928, visiting North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, India, China, and Japan, and these journeys helped him to discern those elements within religious experience that were specific and unique, and those which were common to all religions.<sup>126</sup> Otto's travels ignited his interest in the mystical tradition, which was to prove highly significant in the development of his religious outlook.<sup>127</sup> In 1915 he took up a post as Ordinary Professor at the University of Breslau (in what is now Poland), and in 1917 joined the University of Marburg in Germany, where he held the Chair of Systematic Theology. In the same year he published his ground breaking work, *Das Heilige*, which awakened an interest in the mystical within religious understanding and conceptions.<sup>128</sup> Otto explains that mysticism is essentially 'the stressing to a very high degree, indeed the overstressing, of the non-rational or supra-rational elements in religion; and it is only intelligible when so understood'.<sup>129</sup> He goes on to elucidate further that this feature of the non-rational 'recurs in all forms of mysticism everywhere, and it is nothing but the creature consciousness stressed to the utmost'.<sup>130</sup>

James A. Montmarquet shows how William James wrote of a 'Middle Path' in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1905), a path where religious experience presents knowledge for the mystic. James distinguishes between the experience of the mystic and those who have no such experience:

As a matter of psychological fact, mystical considerations of a well pronounced and emphatic sort usually are authoritative over those who have them. They have been

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<sup>125</sup> David M. Whitford, 'Martin Luther', in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/luther/>> [accessed 17 January 2017].

<sup>126</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. x.

<sup>127</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 22.

<sup>128</sup> *Das Heilige* is translated as 'The Idea of the Holy'.

<sup>129</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 22.

<sup>130</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 22.

‘there’ and ‘know’. It is vain for rationalism to grumble about this [...]. Our senses [...] have assured us of certain states of fact; but mystical experiences are as direct perceptions of fact for those who have them as any sensations ever were for us.<sup>131</sup>

By trusting so emphatically in human experience, which may not be capable of producing evidence or proof, James could be accused of naivety and of engaging in an uncritical approach to the study of religious experience. On the other hand, although Otto engaged in an attempt to explain the obscure nature of religious experience and recognised that some human religious response to his ideas are necessary, his writing indicates an awareness of the need for a more objective approach.

Although Otto’s work attracted world-wide attention, John W. Harvey, in the preface to his translation of *Das Heilige*, refers to the fact that Otto never attempted to found a ‘school’.<sup>132</sup> For this Harvey gives three reasons: firstly that Otto’s ‘influence cut across denominational divisions’, secondly that ‘he was much more a philosopher of religion than a dogmatic theologian’, and thirdly (and most importantly) that he desired to show what ‘religious men have in common rather than what divides them’.<sup>133</sup> When Rudolf Bultmann joined the faculty of theology at Marburg in 1921, Otto was to encounter disagreement and challenge for the first time.<sup>134</sup>

Bultmann’s theological position was distinctly different from that of Otto and this was to become a source of contention between the two. The main thrust of Otto’s argument in *Das Heilige* was to gain some acceptance and acknowledgement of the non-rational in religion, while Bultmann’s views were more inclined towards the category of the rational, and as a consequence the relationship between the two theologians was not always congenial.<sup>135</sup> Bultmann was spoken of as a ‘rationalist’ and as such would have differed greatly from Otto in his theological outlook.<sup>136</sup> The word ‘rationalism’ is described in the

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<sup>131</sup> James A. Montmarquet, ‘In Search of James’s Middle Path’, *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (October 2012), pp. 366-7.

<sup>132</sup> Otto, *The Idea of The Holy*, p. xi.

<sup>133</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. xi.

<sup>134</sup> Konrad Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography*, trans. by Philip E. Devenish (Salem: Polebridge Press, 2013), pp. 122-23.

<sup>135</sup> Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography*, pp. 134-35.

<sup>136</sup> Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography*, p. 135.

Oxford English Dictionary as ‘the practice or principle of basing opinions and actions on reason and knowledge rather than on religious belief or emotional response’.<sup>137</sup> On the question of modern mysticism and Otto’s influence at Marburg, Bultmann had written:

In Marburg one senses very strongly the current of modern mysticism and the aversion to history, which is understandable given the influence of Otto [...]. I am regarded as the radical critic and philological historian and will have much resistance to overcome.<sup>138</sup>

The ‘resistance’ of which Bultmann spoke, along with his strained relationship with Otto, continued to grow and was never fully resolved. I shall now go on to examine the ideas of the rational and non-rational.<sup>139</sup>

### **What are the rational and the non-rational, and how does Otto apply these concepts in his thinking?**

The rational may be described as a theory that considers reason to be the main source of knowledge from which concepts of God arise. The seventeenth-century philosophers, René Descartes, Benedict de Spinoza, and Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr Von Leibniz were among those who were traditionally termed ‘The Rationalists’. Descartes, who founded his ‘school’ of Rationalism, introduced the approach of ‘Cartesian doubt’ and a revolution in metaphysical thought ensued. His theory suggested that the way to discover the nature of things was to apply reason to the problem, as by applying logic to a question it was possible to infer everything there is to know. Descartes’ reasoning led him to write that ‘there is nothing so far removed from us as to be beyond our reach or so hidden that we cannot discover it’.<sup>140</sup> His search for truth involved a logical approach far removed from Otto’s theory of the numinous, which can be experienced unexpectedly, without prior exploration, or attempts at reasoning.<sup>141</sup> Descartes’ rational view led him to see himself as a ‘thinking

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<sup>137</sup> Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>138</sup> Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography*, p. 137.

<sup>139</sup> Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography*, p. 137.

<sup>140</sup> *The Rationalists*, trans. by John Veitch, R. H. M. Elwes, and George Montgomery (New York: Dolphin Books [s.d.]), p. 52.

<sup>141</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 12-13.

thing’, ‘a thing that doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, that imagines also, and perceives’.<sup>142</sup> Otto, while pleading for recognition of the irrational in religious thought, can still attribute an understanding of the numinous to the rational mind.<sup>143</sup>

It was knowledge of religious understanding that Otto sought, and for him this could best be understood by accepting a non-rational element in his thinking about the Divine. He aligned himself, therefore, with the thoughts of Martin Luther (1483-1546), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and Friedrich Schleiermacher. These theological and philosophical thinkers were to have a major influence upon Otto’s own theological ideas, and I shall explore their influence briefly in this chapter and in more depth in Chapter Four of this thesis. However, rationalist thought continued to give the impression that it was in opposition to Otto’s thinking on an element of the irrational in the nature of the deity.

The historian Mark Cullum points to the rationalising elements of Platonic and even pre-Socratic philosophical reflection that ‘showed itself capable of draining religious feeling out of the divine’.<sup>144</sup> Otto shows that the Catholic and Protestant theologians, in Platonic fashion and suspicious of divine emotion, emphasised the rationality of God.<sup>145</sup> However, whether or not God is capable of emotion does not necessarily have a bearing on discussions of the numinous, since particular human experiences and responses can make no difference to the nature of deity. Otto’s thinking is based to some extent on ‘creatureliness’, which by its very nature suggests inferiority to the deity. As he states, ‘It is the emotion of a creature, submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures’.<sup>146</sup> With a strong interest in world faiths and in the mystical tradition, Otto developed his own thinking on the non-rational element of religion in *Das Heilige*.

Otto’s emphasis on the non-rational sprang initially from his personal religious experience and sense of the mystical, as he stated:

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<sup>142</sup> *The Rationalists*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>143</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 3.

<sup>144</sup> Mark Cullum, ‘Rejoice with Trembling’, *Restoration Quarterly*, 53: 1 (2011), p. 18. Atlas Collection: American Theological Library Association (ATLA), p. 20.

<sup>145</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 94.

<sup>146</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 10.

What we have, then, is a sort of antimony, arising from the inner duality in the idea of the divine and the tension of its more rational and its more non-rational elements. (The non-rational assumes thus an apparently *irrational* character). It is the ‘wholly other’ aspect of the *numen*,<sup>147</sup> resisting every analogy, every attempted comparison and every determination; so that it is here really true that, ‘*omnis determinatio est negatio*’.<sup>148</sup>

In these words, Otto stresses the challenge presented by any investigation into the nature of deity.

Recognising in fellow theologians a reluctance to give sufficient respect to the non-rational view of religious understanding and its place in religious consciousness, Otto’s work describes how a rational conception of God is conceived in the Christian faith with the general practice being to attribute to the deity ‘spirit, reason, purpose, good will, supreme power, unity, selfhood’.<sup>149</sup> For him these characteristics invite ‘restriction’ and ‘limitation’; they are ‘clear’ and ‘definite’ concepts that can be termed rational when applied to an object. Otto states that ‘an object that can be thought of conceptually can be described as rational’.<sup>150</sup> He describes the nature of God, which is ‘completed’ when thought of in terms of analogy with human nature and personality, although limited in human terms (i.e. thought of as ‘absolute and unqualified’ when applied to God). Conceived in this way, it is a ‘rational’ nature that is described and ‘a religion which recognises and maintains such a view of God is in so far a “rational” religion’.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, Otto acknowledges that only on such a basis can belief be possible rather than mere ‘feeling’. A problem arises with Otto’s argument, however, since whilst he is striving for acceptance of the non-rational in religion, he goes on to argue that only on the basis of the rational can belief be possible. This suggests that while he attempts to find a place for the non-rational he still sees the idea of the rational as a safe haven where belief

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<sup>147</sup> The best translation for this word I have found is in Costello: ‘The term derives from the Latin *numen*, which literally means “nodding” but has been used since Roman times to refer to divine presence and will’ (2012, p. 184).

<sup>148</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 197. Trans. as ‘every determination is negation’. Parentheses as in original source.

<sup>149</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 1.

<sup>150</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 1.

<sup>151</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 1.

can be found, at least traditionally. However, he issues a warning against a ‘wrong’ and ‘one-sided’ interpretation of religion that defines the essence of deity as purely rational.<sup>152</sup> Harvey, in his introduction to *Das Heilige*, considers Otto’s thinking on the rational and the non-rational, finding some resonance with the seventeenth-century French mathematician and Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal’s thinking on the subject. Harvey quotes from Pascal’s *Pensées* (1671), in which he wrote:

If one subjects everything to reason our religion will lose its mystery and its supernatural character. If one offends the principles of reason our religion will be absurd and ridiculous [...] there are two equally dangerous extremes, to shut reason out and to let nothing else in.<sup>153</sup>

Pascal is attempting to strike a balance between what he sees as a need to respect the spiritual while at the same time trying to satisfy the demands of seventeenth-century thinkers who, some might say, require evidence for belief. In line with Pascal’s thinking is Otto’s idea of the rational and non-rational, which was to prove highly significant for his study. Otto questions whether, ‘in our idea of God, the non-rational is overborne and perhaps wholly excluded by the rational or, conversely, does the non-rational itself preponderate over the rational?’<sup>154</sup>

Although Otto championed the notion of the non-rational, the theologian Philip C. Almond shows that he did not hold the rational in contempt but recognised its importance to religion in its entirety:

In short, the rational is by no means despised by Otto. Not only are the rational elements within religion of significance, but also the relation of its rational and non-rational elements and therefore, religion as a whole, is illuminated by a rational metaphysical system, albeit one with an important place reserved for feeling.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 1.

<sup>153</sup> Pascal’s words quoted by Harvey in Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. xviii-xix.

<sup>154</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 3.

<sup>155</sup> Philip C. Almond, ‘Rudolf Otto: The Context of His Thought’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 36, No. 3, 1983, p. 348.

However, Otto affirms that religion is not ‘exclusively contained and exhaustively comprised in any series of “rational” assertions’ and contends that ‘what is most distinctive in religion cannot be put into words and is, therefore, the non-rational part of religion which cannot be conceptualized’.<sup>156</sup> Otto calls this non-rational element the numinous, a word he coined to express his understanding of that which is holy and non-rational in religious understanding, something that is ineffable and unspeakable.<sup>157</sup> He seeks to define more precisely a proper understanding of the words ‘holy’ and ‘sacred’. In his desire to reclaim the religious understanding of these words, he states, ‘We have come to use the words holy and sacred in an entirely derivative sense, quite different from that which they originally bore’. It was in order to achieve what he saw as a proper understanding of ‘the holy’ that he coined the word numinous.<sup>158</sup> He admits that although the numinous state of mind can be discussed, it cannot be strictly defined or taught, but can only be evoked and awakened in the mind since it comes ‘of the spirit’.<sup>159</sup> Almond traces Otto’s ideas of *heilig* (holy), in part, to the nineteenth-century Swedish theologian Nathan Söderblom’s essay on holiness, where Söderblom asserts:

Holiness is the great word in religion; it is even more essential than the notion of God. Real religion may exist without a definite conception of divinity, but there is no real religion without a distinction between holy and profane.<sup>160</sup>

Otto took up Söderblom’s notion of the relationship between the holy and the profane, and in his analysis of the *mysterium tremendum* he speaks of it as ‘sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship [...] until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its “profane” non-religious mood of everyday experience’.<sup>161</sup> Otto gives his understanding of ‘profaneness’, which he explains as a ‘feeling’ reserved for those whom he calls ‘in the Spirit’. For Otto this is not to do with ‘profane actions’ but connected to a person’s very ‘existence’ in the face of that which is holy, leading to ‘self-deprecation’ and a ‘judgement passed’. Accompanying these overpowering experiences is

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<sup>156</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 4.

<sup>157</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.

<sup>158</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>159</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.

<sup>160</sup> J. Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913, Vol. 6), p. 731. Quoted by Almond in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, p. 357.

<sup>161</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 12.

also a sense of the opposite of the profane, which is ‘the category of the holy’.<sup>162</sup> He goes on to develop his thinking on the effects of the *mysterium tremendum* upon the subject and refers to the consequences of the phenomenon, which can lead to ‘strange excitements, intoxicated frenzy, transport and ecstasy’.<sup>163</sup> The words Otto uses resonate with the language used by Longinus in his description of the sublime.<sup>164</sup>

A further aspect of the *mysterium tremendum* is its power to fascinate. Otto adds the words *et fascinans*<sup>165</sup> to *mysterium tremendum* and shows that while the numinous has elements of awe, fear, and dread, it is also capable of attracting and fascinating.<sup>166</sup> The *mysterium tremendum* encourages a ‘looking at’ and a ‘looking away’. With these ideas in mind, Otto attempts to examine the concepts of the holy or sacred, and early in his work invites the reader to direct his/her mind to a moment of intrinsically felt religious feeling. The absence of such an experience would render the reader incapable of appreciating Otto’s discussion of religious psychology, and so the author suggests that he or she read no further.<sup>167</sup> Here Otto seems to be alluding to some experience of phenomena, as discussed earlier in this chapter. In his assertion he seems to be saying that, without some religious experience to draw upon, anyone reading his work will find it lacking in meaning. Diamond suggests that Otto’s comment is a rhetorical device, since the author is certain that everyone has deeply felt moments of religious experience and he wants the reader to continue to read his work.<sup>168</sup> However, although it may be possible to claim that everyone has such experiences, they may not be recognised or acknowledged as ‘religious’. Diamond goes on to claim that Otto is convinced that many people turn away from the full force of religious experience, mostly because they are terrified of it, and refuse to explore its implications.<sup>169</sup> An experience of the numinous and its attendant *mysterium tremendum* could possibly evoke such a response. An example of the fear that may take hold of a subject during an encounter with what Otto calls *mysterium tremendum*

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<sup>162</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 51.

<sup>163</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>164</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 143.

<sup>165</sup> Trans. as ‘fascination’. Fascination is one of the responses of the subject to the *mysterium tremendum*.

<sup>166</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 31.

<sup>167</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 8.

<sup>168</sup> Diamond, *Contemporary Philosophy and Religious Thought*, pp. 77-8.

<sup>169</sup> Diamond, *Contemporary Philosophy and Religious Thought*, p. 78.

is demonstrated by the writer, novelist, and philosopher Aldous Huxley, as I will go on to demonstrate.

In an attempt to explain the effects upon his mind of an experience under the influence of mescaline, a hallucinogenic and intoxicating compound present in the peyote cactus, Huxley describes an incident that filled him with fear:

the fear, as I analyse it in retrospect, was of being overwhelmed, of disintegrating under a pressure of reality greater than a mind, accustomed to living most of the time in a cosy world of symbols, could possibly bear.<sup>170</sup>

Huxley refers to the literature of religious experience that ‘abounds in references to the pains and terrors overwhelming those who have come, too suddenly, face to face with some manifestation of the *mysterium tremendum*’.<sup>171</sup> His use of the phrase *mysterium tremendum* and his effort to articulate it in relation to his own experience seems to suggest that Huxley had read Otto’s work and could identify a similar experience. He describes this fear as being due to the ‘incompatibility of man’s egotism and the divine purity, between men’s self-aggravated separateness and the infinity of God’.<sup>172</sup> Huxley clearly recognises some aspect of the mind, albeit under the influence of a drug, which is capable of encountering what Otto calls the *mysterium tremendum*, and thus gives a practical example of the non-rational aspect of religion of which Otto speaks. While Otto attempts to identify that which is hidden and yet capable of being made known, the Russian Orthodox Christian theologian, philosopher, and economist Sergius Bulgakoff seeks to connect such ideas with revelation and mystery:

Revelation takes for granted the existence of something which is being disclosed or of a mystery which manifests itself to us. Mystery does not consist merely in that which is unknown or secret, which may or may not be imparted, manifested or withheld [...]. Mystery remains *above* human understanding and can never be exhausted by reason. Logically exact thought can never penetrate mystery, which is above human and worldly comprehension. Yet at the same time it is a necessary

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<sup>170</sup> Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, p. 33.

<sup>171</sup> Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, p. 33. ‘Face to face’ is not hyphenated in original source.

<sup>172</sup> Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, p. 34.

characteristic of mystery to disclose itself, indeed were it not for this fact it would not be a mystery.<sup>173</sup>

Bulgakoff, although not stating it explicitly, thus makes a case for the entrance into human understanding of that which is transcendent, a concept I will explore in detail in Chapter Six of this thesis. Bulgakoff searches for something beyond what he calls ‘logically exact thought’, where mystery reigns supreme and yet retains a desire to make itself known.

An example of the mysterious is discovered by Otto in the biblical Book of Job:

The Book of Job [...] is not so much concerned with the *awfulness* of the majesty of the *numen*,<sup>174</sup> as with its *mysteriousness*; it is concerned with the non-rational in the sense of the irrational, with sheer paradox baffling comprehension, with that which challenges the ‘reasonable’ and what might be reasonably expected, which goes directly against the grain of reason. To this place belong Luther’s violent onslaughts upon the ‘whore Reason’, which must seem grotesque to anyone who has not rightly grasped the problem of the non-rational element in the idea of God.<sup>175</sup>

Otto’s idea of the non-rational in religion was not an entirely new one, since early Christian writers such as John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Plotinus, Augustine, pseudo-Dionysius, and Meister Eckhart, following the Platonic tradition, had all recognised this element in religious consciousness.<sup>176</sup> To take an example from this list, Gregory of Nyssa, to whom Otto refers in *Das Heilige*, speaks of the divine nature as incomprehensible in his work *Against Eunomius* 11 [953-960,1101-1108], iv 11 [524], stating:

Since one of the signs of the Divine Nature is its essential incomprehensibility, in this also must the copy be like the original. For were the nature of the copy comprehended, when the original was above comprehension, the copy would be a mistaken one. But inasmuch as the nature of our spirit is above our understanding,

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<sup>173</sup> John Baillie and Hugh Martin, eds., *Revelation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p. 125.

<sup>174</sup> Trans. As ‘deity’.

<sup>175</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 100.

<sup>176</sup> Philip C. Almond, ‘Rudolf Otto: The Context of his Thought’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 36 (1983), pp. 347-362.

it has here an exact resemblance to the all-sublime, representing, by its own unfathomableness the incomprehensible Being of God.<sup>177</sup>

Here we have a reference to the ‘all-sublime’ in the thinking of Gregory of Nyssa, a phrase he uses to describe the unfathomable nature and incomprehensibility of the Divine in his thought.

### **Otto’s response to Luther’s thought**

It was Otto’s work on Luther that helped him to recognise the non-rational in religion and enabled him to see Luther as part of a tradition reaching back through the German mystics to the neo-Platonists and Plato himself, of whom he says: ‘No one has enunciated more definitively than this master-thinker that God transcends all reason, in the sense that He is beyond the powers of our conceiving, not merely beyond our powers of comprehension’.<sup>178</sup>

Apart from his claim that Plato was of the same opinion, Otto also acknowledges his indebtedness to Luther, who in his sermon on the biblical Book of Exodus, Chapter 20, speaks of the ‘wrath’ of God who is a ‘consuming fire’, and who devours and rages against the wicked.<sup>179</sup> This presents a rather terrifying picture of a God whom Otto had identified in his analysis of the mystical experience as one who is consumed with love.<sup>180</sup> However, it was in his reading of Luther’s *De Servio Arbitrio*<sup>181</sup> that Otto claims he began to understand the numinous and its difference from the rational long before he identified it in the *qadosh*<sup>182</sup> of the Old Testament and in the elements of ‘religious awe’ in general.<sup>183</sup> His reading of Luther finds that, in common with the Protestant mystic Jakob Böhme, intuitions of the numinous exist.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Quoted in Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 194.

<sup>178</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 95.

<sup>179</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 99.

<sup>180</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 24.

<sup>181</sup> Trans. As ‘I serve out of choice’.

<sup>182</sup> Trans. As ‘holy’ or ‘holiness’.

<sup>183</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>184</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 106-107.

With Böhme, as with Luther, the non-rational energy and majesty of God and his ‘awefulness’ appear conceptualized and symbolized as ‘Will.’<sup>185</sup> And with Böhme, as with Luther, this is conceived as fundamentally independent of moral elevation or righteousness, and as indifferent toward good or evil action.<sup>186</sup>

It is interesting to note that both Böhme and Luther, according to Otto, conceive this as ‘independent of moral elevation or righteousness and as indifferent toward good or evil action’.<sup>187</sup> This resonates with Otto’s objection to the way in which the word ‘holy’ has come to be associated with morality.

Otto finds a connection between the experiences of the sublime and those that can be termed religious.<sup>188</sup> The category of the sublime he describes is one that emanates from the study of aesthetics, and although it is a counterpart to the numinous, it is merely a pale reflection of it.<sup>189</sup> As I explained in the introduction to this thesis, the concept of the sublime, as understood in the writings of Longinus, Edmund Burke, and other eighteenth-century theorists, was mainly seen from a secular standpoint. However, on closer examination its effects on human consciousness may eventually reveal that it has something in common with Otto’s sense of the numinous. Similarities between the two, especially in terms of human response, can be seen, as I showed earlier in this chapter, in the call of the biblical prophet Isaiah.<sup>190</sup> So, like the sublime, the sense of the numinous is accompanied by an overwhelming feeling of fear and dread. As Otto states in his reference to the sixth chapter of the biblical Book of Isaiah:

While the element of ‘dread’ is gradually overborne, the connection of ‘the sublime’ and ‘the holy’ becomes firmly established as a legitimate schematization and is carried on into the highest forms of religious consciousness – a proof that there exists a hidden kinship between the numinous and the sublime which is something

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<sup>185</sup> The capability of wishing for something and using one’s mental powers to try to accomplish it.

<sup>186</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 107.

<sup>187</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 107.

<sup>188</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.

<sup>189</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41.

<sup>190</sup> Isaiah 6. *New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 704.

more than a merely accidental analogy, and to which Kant's *Critique of Judgement* bears distant witness.<sup>191</sup>

In Luther and Böhme, then, Otto finds allies for his argument in favour of a non-rational aspect of the divine in religion.

### **Kant's influence on Otto's thinking**

As I have tried to make clear, for Otto the heart of religious experience is the encounter with holiness. In this he differed from Immanuel Kant, who has been called his 'philosophical master' and who interested him enough to cause him to spend his time, as explained at the outset of this chapter, in writing a Habilitation on his work.<sup>192</sup> However, a significant connection can be discerned between Otto's description of the numinous, which takes place in the mind, and Kant's description of the sublime, which is also understood as a state of mind. The theologian Melissa McBay Merritt, considering the moral source of the Kantian sublime, has highlighted Kant's argument that the sublime is not to be found in any *sensible* object even though it may awaken, as Kant says, 'a *supersensible* faculty in us'.<sup>193</sup> The supersensible can be understood as that which is above or beyond the perception of the senses. For Kant, genuine sublimity is not found in any object of nature but only in the mind of one who judges the object in nature.<sup>194</sup> A fascinating reference to the sublime occurs in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, in which the author speaks of the sublime state of mind as a 'vibration, i.e. to a rapidly alternating repulsion from, and attraction to, one and the same object'.<sup>195</sup> This is very much in keeping with Otto's ideas of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum*, which he describes as attracting and repulsing and will have implications for later chapters of this thesis.<sup>196</sup> However, Merritt sees Kant's approach to the phenomenology of the sublime as inadequate in its attempt to specify this state of mind, since other states of mind, such as weakness of will, might be described in

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<sup>191</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 63.

<sup>192</sup> Diamond, *Contemporary Philosophy and Religious Thought*, p. 76.

<sup>193</sup> Melissa McBay Merritt, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 37.

<sup>194</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. by Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), p. 113.

<sup>195</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 115.

<sup>196</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 31.

similar terms.<sup>197</sup> For Kant, though, ‘religion is derivative from moral obligation’.<sup>198</sup> Otto disagrees with such a claim and the fact that Kant speaks of a ‘holy’ will, stating that the use of the term in the context of morality is inaccurate:

Kant calls the will which remains unwaveringly obedient to the moral law, from the motive of duty a ‘holy’ will; here clearly we have simply the perfectly moral will. In the same way we may speak of the holiness or sanctity of duty or law, meaning merely that they are imperative upon conduct and universally obligatory.<sup>199</sup>

Otto was thus willing to oppose Kant when it came to defending his own understanding of the holy. Whereas Kant endowed obedience to the moral law with holiness, Otto would reserve such a word for use in connection with the deity and that which springs from religion.<sup>200</sup> While the holy may involve moral perfection, adherence to the moral law is not necessarily to do with holiness. Such an association between the holy and moral perfection gives Otto cause for complaint:

To be *rapt* in worship is one thing; to be morally *uplifted* by the contemplation of a good deed is another; and it is not to their common features, but to those elements of emotional content peculiar to the first that we would have attention directed as precisely as possible.<sup>201</sup>

However, he praises the opening words of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), where Kant had explored the concept of God in human reason:

That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into exercise otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses? [...] But, though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows that [it] all arises *out* of experience.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Merritt, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 37.

<sup>198</sup> Diamond, *Contemporary Philosophy and Religious Thought*, p. 76.

<sup>199</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 5.

<sup>200</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 143.

<sup>201</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 8.

<sup>202</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 112-13.

Otto approves Kant's opening words since his own argument, which despite being in favour of a non-rational element in religious understanding, is nevertheless rooted in human experience. Although Diamond acknowledges that Otto's term 'numinous' liberated religion from the constraints of morality, he argues that Otto misunderstood Kant, claiming that his investigation of Kantian categories is 'the weakest' part of *Das Heilige*.<sup>203</sup> For Diamond, the particular area under scrutiny is Kant's category of the *a priori*. Otto makes use of this in his claim that all people are capable of religious experience: 'Now this is the criterion of all *a priori*<sup>204</sup> knowledge, namely, that, so soon as an assertion has been clearly expressed and understood, knowledge of its truth comes into the mind with the certitude of first hand insight'.<sup>205</sup> Diamond observes that Otto applies the certainty of an *a priori* statement to religion and in so doing is claiming that God exists.<sup>206</sup> However, what Otto actually says is that '*a priori* cognitions are not such as everyone does have [...] but such as everyone is *capable* of having'.<sup>207</sup> Otto continues to associate his ideas of the numinous with Kant's 'introspection' and 'critical examination of reason'.<sup>208</sup> Kant's recognitions of the 'pure concept' and 'pure feeling' are claimed by Otto as 'precisely applicable' to his own'.<sup>209</sup> Therefore, there is some agreement in their thinking.

Otto understood the category of the sublime as taken from the sphere of aesthetics. Although he acknowledges the sublime to be a counterpart of the numinous, he nevertheless asserts, as I established earlier in this chapter, that the former is but a pale reflection of the latter.<sup>210</sup> As I have argued, his thinking was, to some extent, influenced by Kant. It was towards the end of the eighteenth-century that Kant had considered the concept of the sublime and raised questions about the ability of the mind to comprehend so-called 'supersensible' ideas that, as I stated earlier, can be understood as being beyond the reach of that which can be perceived by the senses. Kant wrote: 'nature also, in space and time, falls short and is inadequate as a means of conveying supersensible or transcendental

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<sup>203</sup> Diamond, *Contemporary Philosophy and Religious Thought*, pp. 85-87.

<sup>204</sup> 'Relating to or denoting reasoning or knowledge, which proceeds from theoretical deduction rather than from observation or experience' (Oxford English Dictionary).

<sup>205</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 137.

<sup>206</sup> Diamond, *Contemporary Philosophy and Religious Thought*, p. 87.

<sup>207</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 177.

<sup>208</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 113.

<sup>209</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 112.

<sup>210</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41.

ideas'.<sup>211</sup> He claims that it is the 'attunement of the spirit evoked by a particular representation engaging the attention of reflective judgement, and not the object, that is to be called sublime'.<sup>212</sup> An analysis of the sublime according to Kant requires it to be divided into the 'mathematical' and 'dynamical'. The mathematically sublime has to do with magnitude and is understood as that which we experience in nature as absolutely great and capable of exceeding the power of our imagination, while the dynamically sublime is experienced as an overwhelming power causing the individual to feel threatened. Kant describes such an experience in the following manner:

Bold overhanging, and as it were threatening rocks, thunderclouds piled up the vault of heaven, borne along with flashes and peals, volcanoes in all their violence of destruction, hurricanes leaving desolation in their track [...] but provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness.<sup>213</sup>

Although Kant presents a vivid picture of the dynamically sublime, it is ultimately the mind that he understands as the true source of sublimity.<sup>214</sup> The literary critic Paul Guyer, commenting on Kant's analysis of the sublime, states:

Kant's 'negative pleasure' in the sublime, that outrages the imagination, sits ill with the harmony of the faculties. Triumph of reason over the imagination, rather than an accord between them appears to be responsible for the feeling of the sublime as Kant analyses it.<sup>215</sup>

Otto considers Kant's understanding of the sublime as 'an idea that cannot be 'unfolded' or explicated. He states that a thing does not become sublime merely by being great, 'since the concept itself remains unexplicated; it has in it something mysterious'.<sup>216</sup> Otto's claim that the sublime 'exhibits the same peculiar dual character as the numinous', since it is both daunting and attracting, has major significance for my work and will be explored in more depth in Chapter Five of this thesis.

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<sup>211</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 128.

<sup>212</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 81.

<sup>213</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>214</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 77.

<sup>215</sup> Paul Guyer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 383.

<sup>216</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41.

## **The holy, the profane, and the unspeakable**

For Otto, the concept of the holy eludes apprehension in terms of concepts, and it is more aligned to the non-rational, that which is unspeakable (αῤρητον).<sup>217</sup> As an example of the ‘unspeakable’, the Greek lexicon cites references from the biblical Book of Leviticus that refers to perverse sexual relations and also to the second Pauline Letter to the Corinthians. The apostle Paul speaks to the Corinthians as one who ‘was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat’.<sup>218</sup> The problem that arises here, in terms of Otto’s understanding of the holy as ‘unspeakable’, is that the word he uses, as found in the Book of Leviticus, could be aligned with that which is called ‘profane’. There appears to be some confusion between the holy and the profane, and in the case of the former Otto objected to its common usage as the epitome of purity, whereas in his thinking it should retain what he sees as its Old Testament meaning of ‘separateness’.<sup>219</sup>

Ideas of the sacred and the profane were explored by the Romanian historian of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), in his work on myth, ritual, and symbolism in the nature of religion.<sup>220</sup> Eliade clearly studied *Das Heilige* and had great respect for it, since he begins his own work with a reference to the impact Otto’s thought had across the globe.<sup>221</sup> However, Eliade’s attempt to find a connection between the sacred and the profane was not a novel idea, since the French sociologist, social psychologist, and philosopher Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) had recognised in 1912 the dichotomy that existed between the two and saw it as a significant characteristic of religion.<sup>222</sup> I shall now examine the stance taken by these two thinkers on the question of the holy and the profane and try to discover whether Durkheim’s thinking influenced Otto as he wrestled with the concept of the numinous.

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<sup>217</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 2. This translation is also found in Homer as ‘unspoken’. Biblical ref: Leviticus, 18. 23. Manual Greek Lexicon (Abbott-Smith), p. 61.

<sup>218</sup> Leviticus 18.23; II Corinthians 12.4.

<sup>219</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 6.

<sup>220</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (U.S.A: Harcourt Inc., 1957).

<sup>221</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 8

<sup>222</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. by Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1912), p. 47.

Durkheim, in his study of the daily life of the Australian Aborigines, observed that their time was divided between the everyday routines that ensured their survival, and the remaining time, which was devoted to exciting social events involving dance, masks, and ecstatic experiences.<sup>223</sup> I shall expand on and develop the use of masks and ecstatic experiences in Chapter Five of this thesis. Durkheim saw such gatherings as creating a distinction in the minds of the members between the sacred and the profane.<sup>224</sup> However, any attempt to make a connection, as Eliade and Durkheim have done, could be very easily misunderstood, since efforts to relate and connect such polarised concepts, and to begin to see them as almost inseparable, is likely to lead to confusion. Nevertheless, the question has arisen and Eliade and Durkheim have tried to answer it. The British anthropologist Jack Goody, considering Durkheim's position, states:

Durkheim developed the thesis that all peoples recognised a radical dichotomy of the universe into the Sacred and the Profane. In accordance with this proposition, he offered his famous definition of religion as 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them'.<sup>225</sup>

While the sacred represented, for Durkheim, the interests and unity of the group, the profane was to do with ordinary, mundane, and individual concerns. Sacred and profane were not, in Durkheim's thinking, equivalent to good and evil, since both could be either good or evil.<sup>226</sup> Eliade's endeavour to make a connection between the two is not, therefore, without support.<sup>227</sup> However, it is a small step to developing a distorted view of the holy when it is spoken of in the same breath as the profane; attempts to explain such a concept are likely to lead to further confusion and perplexity. One theory may be that the holy, understood from a religious point of view and associated with the 'wrath' of God, may cast a shadow of profanity upon anything near to it, suggesting a 'contagion' that emanates from

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<sup>223</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 219.

<sup>224</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 38.

<sup>225</sup> Jack Goody, 'Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem', *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1961), pp. 142-164; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/586928> (accessed: 1 December 2016).

<sup>226</sup> Daniel Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006), p. 96.

<sup>227</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 8-9.

the intrinsic nature of holiness. I shall say more on this later in this chapter, when I consider some of the writings of the Swedish theologian Helmer Ringgren (1917-2012).

The concept of the sacred and the profane presents a challenge to the Bulgarian-French philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva (b.1941), who links her ideas with the sublime and abjection. Kristeva names abjection as ‘above all ambiguity, because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it [...] on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger’.<sup>228</sup> Kristeva’s use of the word ambiguity finds resonance with aspects of Otto’s thought on a numinous experience’s effects on the psyche. Other words used by Kristeva, such as ‘threaten’ and ‘danger’, evoke a sense of Otto’s *mysterium tremendum*, which he claims overwhelms the subject, causing, as I stated earlier, fear, awe, and trembling.<sup>229</sup>

A similar extremism is found in the art world. Writing in ‘Modernism and the Sublime’, the literary critic Philip Shaw makes reference to the enigma of the paintings of Francis Bacon.<sup>230</sup> He speaks of Bacon’s ‘stress on viscosity’ and on ‘the raw material ooze of embodied experience’, where the ‘path to transcendence’ is impeded.<sup>231</sup> Bacon sought to present truth and reality in his work, which focuses on the anxiety, alienation, and revulsion he witnessed in daily life. There is a shameless honesty about Bacon’s work that seems to reach beyond any need for pity or consolation. Perhaps for this reason, any hope associated with the transcendent is rejected. The author and broadcaster Melvyn Bragg, writing in *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper, speaks of Bacon as his friend, someone who was fascinated by ‘cruelty and violence’ and immersed in extremes whose art responded to the abjection encountered in the world.<sup>232</sup> Bacon may not have used the word ‘God’ but in his work he

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<sup>228</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 9.

<sup>229</sup> Otto, p. 14.

<sup>230</sup> Philip Shaw, ‘Modernism and the Sublime’, in Nigel Llewellyn and Christine Riding (eds.), *The Art of the Sublime*, January 2013, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-modernism-and-the-sublime-r1109219> [accessed: 3 January 2014].

<sup>231</sup> Shaw, in ‘Modernism and the Sublime’, p. 18.

<sup>232</sup> Melvyn Bragg, ‘My Friend Francis Bacon’, in *The Daily Telegraph*, 15-11-2013, [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk) [accessed 29 January 2014].

depicts what Eliade referred to as a ‘terrible power’.<sup>233</sup> The ‘terrible power’ that Bacon depicted was lived out in the agonies of his subjects’ existence.

It was this ‘terrible power’ that Otto sought to articulate through his understanding of the mystery of God. As Eliade had claimed, the ‘terrible power’ is manifested in the divine wrath, but how can divine wrath be understood?<sup>234</sup> The Hebrew word *חרה* (*harah*) meaning ‘anger’, occurs in the Old Testament and refers to human anger towards other humans, as in the case of Esau and his brother Jacob.<sup>235</sup> Otto and Eliade, however, are referring to divine anger, and this is spoken of as a response to the sins and pride in the minds of God’s people, which are an ‘insult to his holiness’.<sup>236</sup> The claims of Eliade and the scripture references appear to suggest a relationship between holiness and divine wrath, which formed part of Otto’s argument and will have implications for my work in Chapter Six. Commenting on Otto, Eliade finds occasion to speak of the overwhelming power of God:

Otto had read Luther and had understood what the “living God” meant to a believer. It was not the God of the philosophers – of Erasmus, for example; it was not an idea, an abstract notion, a mere moral allegory. It was a terrible *power* manifested in the divine wrath.<sup>237</sup>

In a similar way, Ringgren sought a path through ideas of the sacred and profane. His work examines the intricacies of Israelite religion, writings, and scriptures, and finds one occasion where a connection can be made between the holy and another kind of profane, apart from the mundane as discussed by Durkheim; the reference is to what Ringgren refers to as ‘uncleanness’:

The only evidence for a connection between uncleanness and holiness is a late passage from the Mishnah (Yadayim 3:2 f.) that states that the holy scriptures ‘make the hands unclean’. This must either represent a late contamination on the analogy

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<sup>233</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>234</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>235</sup> Genesis 27.44.

<sup>236</sup> Vine’s *Complete Expository Dictionary*, p. 296.

<sup>237</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 8-9.

that what is unclean must not be touched or else the simple idea that these writings are so holy that they automatically make the reader's hands seem unclean.<sup>238</sup>

Some evidence for the Jewish attitude to ideas of holy and profane can be observed in the way in which Hebrew scrolls are treated during readings in a synagogue. In order to follow the texts, a ׀ *yod* (pointer) is used to guide the reader so that there is no human physical contact with the scroll. To develop Ringgren's argument, is the scroll, which is considered to be holy, contaminated by contact with the reader's hands or does contamination arise as a contagion capable of communicating itself to the reader if the scroll is touched? Although the argument is about the scrolls, what is being implied is that this holiness, which is so perilous, is reflecting the nature of the deity. In addition to the experience of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah, referred to earlier, other examples of the dichotomy between holiness and profanity occur in the Old Testament. For example, after his many tribulations, Job receives a vision of God that prompts him to cry out: 'I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes'.<sup>239</sup> Job, aware of his own sinfulness and the holiness he experiences in his vision, arrives at a state of humility and self-examination. Another example can be found in the book of Genesis, where the patriarch Jacob encounters God, becoming acutely aware of a divine presence and his own inadequacy:

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place - and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven".<sup>240</sup>

I have tried to show that there are examples of that which is simultaneously holy, profane, unclean, and contagious in religious thinking and in aspects of life and art. They emerge in the Old Testament and prevail today in Jewish religious practices. Sometimes they seem to overlap and are difficult to separate from one another, but they continue to raise questions about why they exist and whether they might have any relationship to the concept of the numinous and the sublime.

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<sup>238</sup> Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion* (London: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 142.

<sup>239</sup> Job 42.5.

<sup>240</sup> Genesis 28.16-17.

## Conclusion

Rudolf Otto's main interest was in the phenomenology of religion and he sought to find acceptance for its non-rational element. His thinking may since have made him appear fanatical to other theologians; no doubt, a more rational approach may have been safer and more readily acceptable. However, he finds support for the argument he puts forward by searching the writings of other notable thinkers, including Luther and Schleiermacher. He also finds evidence of intuitions of the numinous and support for his radical thinking among theological writers and philosophers reaching back to Plato.

In this chapter I have surveyed Otto's early life, religious background, and theological position. I have also explored, in some detail, the idea of the non-rational in religion and how it relates to the rational. It was important for Otto to reclaim what he saw as the rightful meaning of the words 'holy' and 'sacred', since they had become synonymous with morality, not least in the writings of Kant. Otto sought to return them to what he understood to be their rightful place, which was in their Hebraic sense of 'separate' and 'consecrated', as in his thinking they meant to be 'set apart' (for God). I have further considered the influences of Luther, Schleiermacher, and Kant on Otto's thought and have attempted to explain what is meant by the 'unspeakable'. I have also considered the sublime in Otto's thought which he understood as a phenomenon and something that could be mentioned in light of the numinous.

It is a tribute to the tenacity of Otto's insistence of a place for the non-rational in religion to find that forty years after the publication of *Das Heilige*, Mircea Eliade was able to claim in the opening lines of his own work that 'The extraordinary interest aroused all over the world by Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* still persists'.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 8.

## Chapter Two

### The Secular Sublime: Defining Its Characteristics and Eighteenth-Century Thinkers' Engagement with the Concept

In Chapter One I showed that Otto had a lively interest in the phenomenology of religious consciousness and comparative religion. His travels and studies had led him to distinguish between that which was common to all religions and that which could be described as more distinctive and unique. After the publication of his work *Das Heilige*, a greater interest arose in the mystical and how it relates to religious conceptions. As a result of this, I defined in the previous chapter what Otto recognised as the place of the rational in religion and how he sought to secure the approval of fellow theologians for the non-rational, for which he coined the word numinous. He aimed to detail more accurately how the words holy and sacred can be understood, along with his opposition to any association between holiness and morality, such as had emerged in the writings of Immanuel Kant. I argued that while seventeenth-century philosophers considered reason to be a source of knowledge, from which concepts of God could evolve, Otto's plea was for recognition of the non-rational, or numinous, which could be experienced without any attempt at reasoning. I showed that, disappointingly for Otto, his fellow theologians were unwilling to give adequate recognition to the non-rational aspect of religion for which he sought acceptance. My attempt to state where Otto stood in relation to other theologians and philosophers, whose work had either impressed him or caused him to disagree with them, was an important step in answering my research question on the relations between the discourses of the secular sublime and the concepts of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum* in the work of Rudolf Otto. I therefore explored their influences on Otto's thinking.

In this chapter I will give a description of the concept of the secular sublime and show examples of how it has been defined. Reference will also be made to its origins in Longinus's first century work, *Peri Hypsous (On the Sublime)*. The discourses on the sublime that have emerged in the writings of eighteenth-century theorists, particularly in

the works of John Dennis and Joseph Addison, will be considered and explained together with Dennis's attempts to adapt Longinus's treatise to Christian thought. What seem to be the ruling principles of the secular sublime will be examined, along with where, and in which situations, they have been recognised. A description of the effects of the sublime on those who experienced it will be given, and I shall explore to what extent terror is seen as a ruling principle of the sublime. I will consider aspects of Edmund Burke's discourse on the sublime in his work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). I shall seek to discover how the sublime can be understood in relation to Otto's idea of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, along with some points of comparison between the two.

### **Defining the secular sublime**

In attempting to define the term 'sublime', Timothy M. Costelloe explains that it finds its root in the Greek ὑψος (hypsous), which means 'height, from high, from above, upwards and, metaphorically, summit or crown'. This he aligns with the Latin *sublimis*, meaning 'high up, aloft, elevated, tall or towering'.<sup>242</sup> The sublime therefore suggests an exalted state, achieved by either a determined attempt to reach up to that which is within reach of human thought or to respond to some natural phenomena that repays with the gift of sublime experience. Costelloe defines this sublime experience as 'those aspects of their world that excite in them particular emotions, powerful enough to evoke transcendence, shock, awe and terror'.<sup>243</sup> Such emotions emerge as common to the sublime and also to the numinous and it is this relationship that my thesis attempts, in part, to explore. Moving from what Costelloe calls the 'complicated history of the word (sublime) and the competing etymologies of the term', he refers to its figurative meanings as including:

honour, promotion, and high rank; to set up high and lift up; [...] religious and secular indications of loftiness and purification; [...] and style – that is the

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<sup>242</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 2.

<sup>243</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 2.

expression of lofty ideas in an elevated manner and, eventually those ideas themselves.<sup>244</sup>

A further attempt to define the sublime has been made by Christine Riding, who describes it as ‘having the quality of greatness, magnitude or intensity, whether physical, metaphysical, moral, aesthetic or spiritual that humankind is rendered incapable of perceiving or comprehending: words fail us; we are beyond the limits of reason’.<sup>245</sup> Riding’s suggestive description of the sublime ends with the negative assertion that it is something experienced by humankind, who as yet are incapable of perceiving it since it is ‘beyond the limits of reason’. Such language is mystifying, and yet Riding is clearly aware that sublime experience is capable of overwhelming the subject to such an extent that human reason fails. I contend that these perceptions relate, not only to the sublime, but also to the numinous, and as my work progresses I shall attempt to relate these understandings to the ideas of other thinkers. I will now look in more detail at some early evidence of the concept of the sublime through the work of Longinus.

### ***Peri Hypsous: On the sublime/on fine writing***

As a concept, the secular sublime emerged in a first-century work entitled *περι ψῦς* (*Peri Hypsous*), which has been translated as *On the Sublime*. Although initially of doubtful authorship, the work has been attributed to the first-century Greek tutor and critic, Longinus. The treatise is addressed to one Postumius Terentianus, whom Longinus respects as a man of erudition and at whose request the author writes his discourse on sublimity.<sup>246</sup> Longinus seeks Terentianus’s opinion as to whether his observations on sublimity ‘may be thought useful to public men’. Longinus’s aim, at a time when excellence in rhetoric was of supreme importance, was to give some practical help in the development of oratorical skills and equip his readers to move and persuade their listeners. Sublimity, then, is described by Longinus as ‘a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse’, and he goes on to praise it as ‘the source of the distinction of the very greatest

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<sup>244</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>245</sup> Christine Riding, ‘Art and the Sublime: Terror, Torment and Transcendence’ (London: Tate Publishing, 2010), p. 2. Part of *The Sublime Object: Nature, Art and Language*, research project.

<sup>246</sup> Postumius Terentianus is unidentified.

poets and prose writers'.<sup>247</sup> The development of oratorical skills, through reading and the imitation of the best writers, was part of the education system in the Roman Imperial period, as recorded in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (Education of the Orator, c. AD 95). Here he shows that 'Imitation now means not the representation of people and action, as in Plato and Aristotle, but the following and emulation of earlier writers'.<sup>248</sup> Malcolm Heath also shows that 'imitation [...] refers not to narrative or dramatic representation [...] but to the emulation of classical models'. This is not 'superficial' mimicry 'but entering into the model's way of thinking' and thus 'prophetic inspiration' can flow into the soul. Heath goes on to emphasise that Homer was the supreme model for imitation and inspiration, even for one 'as undeniably great as Plato'.<sup>249</sup> However, the term 'imitation' was used in a broad sense by Longinus and included divine inspiration such as that which empowers the priestess at Delphi to deliver her oracles.<sup>250</sup> The literary critic Ernst Curtius shows that the question of mimesis, or mimicry, was one that occupied the mind of Aristotle, who believed that poetry was mimesis and went on to praise Homer for having taught poets 'to lie properly'.<sup>251</sup> However, Curtius disagrees with Aristotle's position and claims that although Ancient Greece knew nothing of the creative imagination there was, in fact, one exception, and that was Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime*.<sup>252</sup> Robert Doran, siding with Curtius, points out that *On the Sublime* has been credited as the 'first treatise to address the creative process'. He sees Longinus's work as developing 'a theory of creativity that represents a secularization of ancient theories of divine inspiration (*enthusiasmos*)'.<sup>253</sup> As an example, we find in Plato's *Ion*: 'All good epic poets produce all their beautiful poems not by art but because they are inspired and possessed'.<sup>254</sup> Here there is also a claim that epic poets compose their works when they are 'not in their right mind'.<sup>255</sup> In other words, as Doran states, the poet 'is a passive conduit or "representative" of the gods, who speak

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<sup>247</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 143.

<sup>248</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xiv.

<sup>249</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>250</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvii.

<sup>251</sup> Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 398.

<sup>252</sup> Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, p. 398.

<sup>253</sup> Robert Doran, 'Imitation and Originality: Creative Mimesis in Longinus, Kant, and Girard', *René Girard and Creative Mimesis*, ed. by Vern Neufeld Redekop and Thomas Ryba (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), pp. 111-122 (p. 114). Spelling of secularization as in original source.

<sup>254</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 5.

<sup>255</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 5.

through him “like a prophet”<sup>256</sup> It is arguable as to whether this mode of thought has any relationship to Longinus’s ideas, which see sublimity as being achieved in an orator’s or writer’s ability to amaze and transport an audience, overwhelming them with irresistible power.<sup>257</sup>

For Longinus the pure skill of the orator is accompanied by divine inspiration, as I stated earlier when referring to his conception of the oracles of the priestess of Delphi. Longinus makes no distinction between poetry and prose, as Plato, Aristotle, and Horace do, but ‘rhetoric and poetics merge to produce a notion of criticism which embraces literature as a whole’.<sup>258</sup> The art of rhetoric was a significant element in the lives of politicians and scholars, and it was on this art that Longinus based his treatise. The work was destined to be a major influence and starting point for aestheticians and philosophers in their wide-ranging debate on the sublime in nature, literature, and art, but its influence moved far beyond Longinus’s text.<sup>259</sup> St Augustine, in *The Confessions* (c. 354), shows that there continued to be an emphasis on the skill of oratory, and Augustine himself earned a living as a professor of rhetoric in Milan.<sup>260</sup> Apart from the skill of oratory, Longinus’s treatise included the art of writing, which I will go on to explain.

### **Writing and oratory in Longinus’s work**

Longinus classified the art of writing under three styles of oratory: grand for arousing emotions, plain for setting out arguments, and intermediate for giving pleasure.<sup>261</sup> His focus on ‘height’, ‘grandeur’, or ‘sublimity’ was not about the division of the three styles but to do with a specific way of writing, which he describes as the ‘hallmark of great literature’.<sup>262</sup> However, the main thrust of his work finds the sublime expressing itself through five sources of sublimity, requiring as a foundation a ‘command of language,

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<sup>256</sup> Doran, ‘Imitation and Originality’, p. 114.

<sup>257</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvi.

<sup>258</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvi.

<sup>259</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 158.

<sup>260</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by R. S. Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), p. 189.

<sup>261</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvi.

<sup>262</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvi.

without which nothing worthwhile can be done'.<sup>263</sup> The first source of sublimity lies in grandeur of thought, this being the ability to form grand conceptions that is a characteristic of natural greatness. The second lies in having power to move the passions, expressing itself in language that is capable of moving and affecting the emotions in both the speaker and the hearer.<sup>264</sup> The three further sources of sublimity Longinus lists as: figures of thought and figures of speech, noble diction and phrasing, and dignified and elevated composition. These are evidenced in the effective use of stylistic and rhetorical figures, as a means of increasing the emotional impact of literature, and are most effective when the fact that it is a figure is not obvious to the hearer or reader.<sup>265</sup> The first two sources Longinus understands as innate, while the other three are products of art and may be described as the ability to make use of and imitate great writers and poets of the past.<sup>266</sup> For Longinus, sublimity is therefore a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse in literary language found in the greatest poets and prose writers, which gives their work a lasting quality and establishes their superiority and fame. The grandeur that Longinus speaks of is understood to produce ecstasy rather than persuasion in the hearer, and the addition of wonder and astonishment proves it to be superior to the merely pleasant and persuasive. Persuasion, as that which can be controlled, seems to appeal less favourably to Longinus than the combination of wonder and amazement, since by its invincible power and force it can get the better of every hearer.<sup>267</sup>

The fact that thoughts of the sublime were initially to do with oratory is shown in the writings of the Roman senator and historian, Tacitus, in his *Dialogue on Orators* (c. CE 74). Tacitus speaks of the pleasures of oratory, the delights of which are not confined to one particular moment but available daily: 'think of [...] the show you make on the public scene; the adoration displayed in the courts; the luxury of rising and taking up your position, the spectators silent [...] think of the crowds ready to feel any emotion the orator may assume'!<sup>268</sup> While a sense of elevation takes place in the mind of an orator, ready with his speech, the highest pleasure of all Tacitus reserves for the extemporary speaker: 'daring

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<sup>263</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 121.

<sup>264</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvi.

<sup>265</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, pp. xvii-xlviii.

<sup>266</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xvii.

<sup>267</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 143.

<sup>268</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 114.

and rash in his invention'.<sup>269</sup> The delights of the rhetorical sublime, of which Longinus had spoken earlier, focused on the grand or elevated as aspects of language, while the true sublime he understood as having the power to 'uplift our souls [...] filling us with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaulting joy just as though we had produced ourselves what we had heard'.<sup>270</sup> The rhetorical and the true sublime were then a shared pleasure of both the orator and his audience. While Longinus places an emphasis on rhetorical sublimity, he also has something to say about sublimity in the natural world. Such thinking I will later show, in this chapter, to have resonance with the writings of John Dennis (1658-1734) and other eighteenth-century theorists. For the present, however, I want to show that Longinus wished to see and encourage elevated language used in any reference to the sublime. He is on guard against 'undignified vocabulary' and although praising Herodotus's description of a storm as 'magnificent', he complains that some of the language used does much to 'dissipate' the sublime effect. He objects to such phrases as 'the sea seethed/the wind slacked', as colloquial words that destroy the 'grandeur'.<sup>271</sup> For Longinus, then, a discussion of the sublime in nature demands a sublime style of writing. As the idea of the sublime developed, some attention to the natural sublime emerges in the writings of John Dennis and other eighteenth-century theorists, whose contribution to ideas of the sublime I will now consider.

### **Eighteenth-century thought on the sublime**

John Dennis was one of the earliest English writers to engage with the concept of the sublime, becoming a significant contributor in its development. Dennis sought to place classical and philosophical categories within a Christian framework. This was coupled with an intention to influence and reform the nation through the cultivation of a synthesis of poetry and religion. It has to be said that Dennis had political aims in his recasting of the term '*enthusiasmos*',<sup>272</sup> which will be more closely considered later. However, in his examination of Longinus's treatise, he complains of inconsistencies and contradictions.

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<sup>269</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 114.

<sup>270</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 120.

<sup>271</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 184.

<sup>272</sup> Trans. as 'enthusiasm'.

For example, he objects that Longinus has not clearly defined the sublime and even on one occasion ‘has given an account of it that is contrary to the true nature of it’, which suggests that Dennis had developed his own conception of the sublime.<sup>273</sup> A further objection presented by Dennis lies in Longinus’s claim that sublimity is without passion even though readers are informed that ‘the sublime does not so properly persuade us, as it ravishes and transports us, and produces in us a certain admiration, mingled with astonishment and surprise’.<sup>274</sup> Such a description is, for Dennis, an example of the ‘enthusiastic passion’ to be discovered in the sublime, and he cites as evidence Longinus’s second source of sublimity, which involves ‘strong and inspired emotion’.<sup>275</sup> Such ‘strong and inspired emotion’ may be related to ideas of the sublime in nature, to which Longinus makes brief reference:

Though nature is on the whole a law unto herself in matters of emotion and elevation, she is not a random force and does not work altogether without method. She is herself in every instance a first and primary element of creation, but it is method that is competent to provide and contribute quantities and appropriate occasions for everything, as well as perfect correctness in training and application.<sup>276</sup>

In spite of Dennis’s criticism of Longinus, he nevertheless commends the effort that has been made in the early chapters of the book to describe the effects of the sublime on the mind:

It causes in them admiration and surprise; a noble pride, and a noble vigour, an invincible force, transporting the soul from its ordinary situation, and a transport, and a fulness of joy mingled with astonishment.<sup>277</sup>

I will now go on to show how some of this passion, of which Dennis speaks, emerges in his correspondence.

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<sup>273</sup> John Dennis, from ‘The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry’ in Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p.35.

<sup>274</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 37.

<sup>275</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 37.

<sup>276</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p.144.

<sup>277</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 34. Spelling of fulness as in original source.

In a letter written from Turin in Italy on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1688, and appearing in his *Miscellanies of Verse and Prose* (1693), Dennis gives a description of a dangerous crossing of the Alps. His account of the ‘delightful horror’ and ‘terrible joy’ of the experience is given in vivid detail. He views with amazement ‘the impending Rock that hung over us’ and ‘the dreadful Depth of the Precipice, and the Torrent that roared at the bottom’.<sup>278</sup> This awe-inspiring prospect of nature he sees as appearing at once both ‘Smooth and Beautiful’ and ‘Severe’ and ‘Wanton’.<sup>279</sup> His emotions, as he and his companion walk along the treacherous route in fear for their lives, veer between ecstasy and terror, yet even as he experiences a state of delight, trembling takes hold of him.<sup>280</sup> Such a reaction can be compared to Otto’s ideas of the numinous, where the subject is overwhelmed by an objective presence outside the self:

Now this object is just what we have already spoken of as ‘the numinous’. For the ‘creature feeling’ and the sense of dependence to arise in the mind the ‘numen’ must be experienced as present [...] these feelings can only arise in the mind as accompanying emotions when the category of ‘the numinous’ is called into play. The numinous is thus felt as objective and outside the self.<sup>281</sup>

In this sense of ‘something’ lying apart from the self, the American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910) speaks of an ‘*objective presence*’ felt in human consciousness that evokes a sense of ‘*reality*’.<sup>282</sup> Such thinking hints at Otto’s idea of the numinous and resonates with Dennis’s sense of an external reality that pervades the self, not least in the passion and enthusiasm associated with poetry.

In 1696 Dennis began to write of the passion and enthusiasm that prevails in poetical genius and related this thinking to the sublime. With great pains he emphasises the place of passion in poetry and distinguishes between ‘ordinary’ passion and ‘enthusiasms’.

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<sup>278</sup> John Dennis, quoted in Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997) p.277,

<sup>279</sup> John Dennis, quoted in Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, p.277.

<sup>280</sup> Edward Niles Hooker, ed., *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, Volume II, 1711-1729 (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1967), pp. 380-82.

<sup>281</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 11.

<sup>282</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Cosimo Classics 2007), pp. 63-64. The italics are in the original.

The former is ‘comprehended by him who feels it [...] in ‘admiration, terror or joy’, while the latter ‘enthusiasms’ are not clearly understood by the subject. This passion of which he speaks is compared to the spirit in a human body, without which ‘the body languishes and the soul is impotent’. In an attempt to show how poetry can have the same effects on the mind as the sublime, he states: ‘take the cause and the effects together and you have the sublime’.<sup>283</sup> Dennis thus understands poetry as a form of art, and as such sees it as an imitator of nature.

Dennis’s reasoning is explained in his use of a metaphor of the sun, which he speaks of as having ‘a vast and glorious body, and [being] at the top of the visible creation, and the brightest material image of the divinity’.<sup>284</sup> The awe-inspiring image of the sun unites with both Dennis’s theological thought in terms of a Creator God and with sublime feeling, and may be understood as the natural sublime. He contrasts this phenomenon with poetical genius and argues that what had hitherto been regarded as something ‘supernatural and divine’ is no more than a ‘common passion or a complication of common passions’. Dennis uses language that has become familiar when speaking of the sublime, words such as ‘astonishment’, ‘amazed’, and ‘transported’, and he refers to the soul as being exalted, yet he disagrees with Longinus that it is the image of ‘greatness of mind’ and understands such transportation as ‘well regulated pride’, which he suggests is a result of an over-inflated egotism.<sup>285</sup>

Costelloe, however, refers to Dennis’s concerns surrounding the sublime as ‘primarily religious’ and not with ‘sublimity as an aesthetic category in its own right’.<sup>286</sup> As I mentioned earlier, Dennis sought to unite the classical, aesthetic, and philosophical within a religious framework. His ideas, however, were also formulated within a socio-political climate that followed the upheaval of the English Civil War (1642-1651), and this led to a change in the attitude and thinking of his audience. Although Dennis found ‘sublimity in the light of God’, as John Morillo states, his readers moved ‘from a traditional bible-based reading culture to one increasingly valuing empirical, scientific knowledge and

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<sup>283</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 34.

<sup>284</sup> John Dennis, from ‘The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry’, in Ashfield and de Bolla, pp.35-36.

<sup>285</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 30.

<sup>286</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 51.

the worldly ways of a new leisure class'.<sup>287</sup> This was something of a forerunner to the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment. However, for now I will continue to explore Dennis's religious approach to sublimity.

The esteemed 'light of God' that informed Dennis's approach to the sublime had in fact been part of Longinus's thinking when he spoke of the act of creation: 'and God said, let there be light'.<sup>288</sup> Although Dennis's approach to sublimity is linked to religion, and the God in whom he believed caused light to be, he still finds room in his thinking for the idea of terror, which he associates with an angry God. He seeks to show in his discussion from where 'enthusiastic terror' may come. He accuses Longinus of having failed to make this plain and concludes:

The greatest enthusiastic terror then must needs be derived from religious ideas: for since the more their objects are powerful, and likely to hurt, the greater terror their ideas produce; what can produce greater terror than the idea of an angry god?<sup>289</sup>

Dennis recognises some association between terror and the idea of an angry god, and cites an example from Longinus's work, in which the author describes the Greek gods engaging in battle with each other.<sup>290</sup> The scene is set as Zeus calls all the gods together to make a choice whether to support the warring Trojans or Achaeans, he is concerned for them even though they will try to destroy one another. However, Zeus takes the opportunity to partake of a sublime moment: 'nevertheless I propose to stay here and seat myself in some Olympian glen from which I can enjoy the spectacle'.<sup>291</sup> Zeus, although he admits concern, behaves in the same way as others who later sought the sublime, as he finds delight in watching the scene from a distance. The 'angry' god of which Homer speaks, and frequently relates in human terms in the mortal combat of the gods, is very different from that which is termed the 'wrath' of God encountered in the Hebrew Old Testament. As I mentioned in Chapter One when considering Otto's attempt to understand the mystery of God, the phrases 'divine wrath' and 'terrible power' have some relationship with the

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<sup>287</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 22.

<sup>288</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 152.

<sup>289</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 36.

<sup>290</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, edited by E. V. Rieu (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 366-79.

<sup>291</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, p. 366.

‘holiness’ that Otto speaks of and is understood as a Godly response to the sin and pride manifested in the minds of God’s people. In this discussion I have tried to show how Dennis struggled with his own headstrong religious faith. In order to establish his theory of the sublime, he accuses Longinus of failing to make plain from where the enthusiastic terror he associates with the sublime comes. However, Longinus emphasises his point about ‘the light of God’ in the Genesis story by using an example of divine light from Homer. The hero Ajax, whilst in the fray, does not pray for life, since that would be unworthy of his heroic nature, but rather he prays for light:

‘Deliver the sons of the Achaens out of the mist,  
Make the sky clear, and let us see  
In the light—kill us’.<sup>292</sup>

In addition to Dennis, other eighteenth-century theorists sought to engage with the concept of the sublime, and I now go on to consider their thoughts.

The essayist and poet Joseph Addison (1672-1719), writing in the *Spectator* (412/413) between 1712 and 1714, seeks to find an answer to the ongoing question regarding the source of the sublime, something, as I explained, that Dennis accused Longinus of failing to achieve. For Addison, as for Dennis, the source of the sublime was to be found in God. However, as Ashfield and de Bolla point out, the ‘theological certainties’ of the past were no longer to be trusted but began to be replaced by the new beliefs of the Enlightenment’.<sup>293</sup> Hitherto, knowledge had been rooted in religious belief, but new thinking opened such attitudes to serious questioning. Addison was clearly of the conviction that a concept such as the sublime could make sense only if it had something to do with the deity, as he states in *Spectator* 413 when considering the psychological effects of vastness on the imagination:

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<sup>292</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 152.

<sup>293</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 6.

One of the final causes of our delight, in anything that is *great*, may be this. The supreme author of our being has so formed the soul of man, that nothing but himself can be its last, adequate and proper happiness.<sup>294</sup>

He goes on to make connections between the ‘contemplation’ of God and the ‘apprehension of greatness’, seemingly suggesting that humanity’s delight in that which is ‘great or unlimited’ is congruent with the idea of a supreme Creator. As such, he claims: ‘Our admiration [...] immediately rises at the consideration of any object that takes up a great deal of room in the fancy, and by consequence, will improve into the highest pitch of astonishment and devotion when we contemplate his nature’.<sup>295</sup> Here he relates this ‘astonishment’ and ‘devotion’ to the Creator God and ‘Supreme Author of our Being’ of whom he spoke. For Addison, a contemplation of God, as the Creator, was linked to the ultimate happiness of humankind, and all this arises from humanity being in God’s image, which leads to an appreciation of that which Addison sees as the work of the Creator. Humankind can, for Addison, take delight in those things that are ‘new’ or ‘uncommon’, which bring pleasure and rewards for the effort made in searching out knowledge and making ‘fresh discoveries’.<sup>296</sup> It is theological thought in relation to the sublime that engages Addison rather than rhetorical ideas, which are seen by Hope Nicholson to be merely secondary in his thought, having ‘a great dependence’ upon those ideas that were primary and came directly from nature’.<sup>297</sup>

Continuing to praise the pleasures of the imagination, Addison claims that it is the ‘actual view’ and ‘survey of outward objects’, along with the pleasures that arise from the experience, which proceed from what is ‘great, uncommon or beautiful’.<sup>298</sup> He speaks of ‘a great uncultivated desert’, along with ‘heaps of mountains, high rocks and precipices or a wide expanse of water’, which impress by their ‘rude kind of magnificence’.<sup>299</sup> Costelloe, in his consolidation of this aspect of Addison’s thought, focuses on his view of the imagination, which contains ‘a kind of *seeing*’ and recognises a co-relation between

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<sup>294</sup> Addison, the Spectator, 1712, quoted in Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p.63.

<sup>295</sup> Addison, The Spectator, 413, 1712, quoted in Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p.64.

<sup>296</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 64.

<sup>297</sup> Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1997), p. 310.

<sup>298</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 62.

<sup>299</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p.62.

imagination and sight. It is a kind of ‘*mental seeing*’ in which the eye and the imagination are involved that brings about ‘an endless source of untold pleasure’.<sup>300</sup> For Addison it is possible that a suitable account of an object, even a disagreeable one, can please if the description is pleasing. As an example, he goes on to present an image of a dung-hill, the description of which, when suitable language is used, can be pleasurable to the imagination of the hearer.<sup>301</sup> He shows, further, that the ‘nature of this pleasure [...] does not arise so properly from the description of what is terrible as from the reflection we make on ourselves at the time of reading it’.<sup>302</sup> As Shaw shows, ‘sublimity therefore no longer resides in the object, or in the mind of the beholder, but in the discourse within which it is framed’.<sup>303</sup> The source of the sublime, then, follows a course from light as its inspiration in Longinus to the language that describes it. Addison goes on to claim that it is that which is ‘great, surprising or beautiful’ rather than that which is ‘little, common or deformed’ which is sublime. The impact of the phenomena, which Addison describes, provides delight for the human imagination that ‘loves to be filled with an object or to grasp at anything that is too big for its capacity’.<sup>304</sup> Vast mountain ranges and precipices representing greatness are, therefore, appropriate when contemplating the sublime. Addison contrasts the greatness, novelty, or beauty of an object and the possibility that there may be something terrible, offensive, or loathsome attached to it that detracts from the pleasure, and yet can still produce a mixture of delight amid the very disgust it raises.<sup>305</sup>

Addison’s thinking bears some relation to that which I discussed earlier, when I referred to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* as found in Otto’s thinking on the numinous. While the sublime has inspired language of greatness and beauty, the numinous has an inclination towards the offensive or loathsome. However, as I stated in Chapter One, Otto, while acknowledging the awe, terror, and holy dread found in numinous encounter, also spoke of the ‘gentle tide’ that took possession of the mind, bringing a sense of tranquillity and worship.<sup>306</sup> However, the eighteenth century witnessed an on-going

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<sup>300</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 58.

<sup>301</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 67.

<sup>302</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>303</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), p. 45, 1<sup>st</sup> edition.

<sup>304</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 62.

<sup>305</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 62.

<sup>306</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 12.

conversation relating to the sublime, and I shall now explore the thinking of John Baillie (1741-1806).

In his *Essay on the Sublime* (1747), Baillie refers to the kind of writing that is of an ‘excellent and great manner, peculiar to a genius: noble lofty and comprehensive’.<sup>307</sup> By these words, he was making reference to Longinus who, he claims, did not restrict himself to any one particular style of writing. Instead, he tells us that ‘some part of his treatise regards the figurative style, some the pathetic and some that is properly called the sublime’, and towards each Baillie directs his criticism.<sup>308</sup> For now I will focus on his attention to the sublime. It is interesting to note that he, like Addison, asks the important question, ‘what is the sublime’? Along with other eighteenth-century theorists, he accuses Longinus of ‘passing over’ this issue and therefore leaving room for ‘speculation’, in which Baillie begins to engage. In accordance with his precursors, Dennis and Addison, Baillie’s speculation leads him to reflect upon the sublime of natural objects before giving consideration to writing. His reflections result in him using the term sublime in reference to any natural object capable of raising the mind to ‘fits of greatness’, and he claims only that which ‘disposes the mind to this enlargement of itself’ can truly be called sublime.<sup>309</sup> There is a shift, then, from rhetoric to nature and on to the mind. Baillie, therefore, as evidenced by his thinking on the sublime, is moving towards a notion of the sublime that is not limited to fine writing or any transportation of the senses that it may invoke. On the contrary, he speaks of ‘the face of a fine building’ that may raise the soul to new heights.<sup>310</sup> However, he is not without criticism of conceptions of the sublime: ‘I am apt to think we sometimes imagine a greater sublime in objects than what there really is’.<sup>311</sup> Baillie’s comment begs the question about the role of the imagination in experiences of the sublime and builds on Addison’s point about language and the dunghill, as I discussed earlier. It is questionable whether the sublime is rooted in objects of nature or in human thought. However, the transformational power of language enters in and articulates the astonishment and sensations evoked by great objects. Shaw makes a notable point in

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<sup>307</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 87.

<sup>308</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 87.

<sup>309</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 88.

<sup>310</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p.98.

<sup>311</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 98.

respect of Baillie's ideas of the sublime, referring to his 'reluctant conclusion that certain objects become sublime as a result of association, or connection'.<sup>312</sup> Shaw goes on to show that while impressive buildings may elicit a sense of 'riches, power and grandeur', they 'form a code, which works like a language, to evoke a feeling of sublimity'.<sup>313</sup> Although not necessarily associated with religious awe, such thinking can find resonance with ideas of the numinous. One example of religious awe is to be found in Otto's section on 'The Law of the Association of Feelings' where he introduces the notion that taking analogies from the region of aesthetics rather than from religion might be helpful in grasping the 'boundless awe and boundless wonder' of the numinous that with its *mysterium tremendum* exercises supreme fascination.<sup>314</sup> He goes on to explain that 'It is a well-known and fundamental psychological law that ideas "attract" one another, and that one will excite another and call it into consciousness, if it resembles it'.<sup>315</sup> Otto is saying something similar to Baillie in terms of the association of ideas.

Ashfield and de Bolla's post-structuralist interpretation of the works of eighteenth-century theorists takes up the problems that arise regarding the status of the sublime. The sublime, according to their theory and as pointed out by Shaw, is seen as 'a textual or linguistic phenomenon', and therefore sublimity becomes an effect of language.<sup>316</sup> As the enlightenment took place, the decline in theological absolutes took hold and resulted in changes in both theological and secular thought, as Ashfield and de Bolla state:

It is this general shift from a situation in which knowledge is grounded in religious belief to one in which a series of interlinked technical discourses determine [...] that we mean to highlight in the development of the discourse on the sublime.<sup>317</sup>

Without the authority of religion, a new way of looking at the sublime was required. The linked question that remains is: does a perception of the sublime arise from within the human subject or is it induced by external objects or language? A look at Edmund Burke's

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<sup>312</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 44.

<sup>313</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 44.

<sup>314</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41.

<sup>315</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 42.

<sup>316</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 11.

<sup>317</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 6.

theories, especially that of a possible ruling principle of the sublime, may help to elucidate this.

### **Edmund Burke and the ruling principle of the sublime**

After 1674, when Longinus's treatise was translated into French by Nicholas Boileau the work gained a wider readership. This was further established by William Smith's landmark English translation in 1739, *On the Sublime*, which went into its fifth and final edition in 1800.<sup>318</sup> Interest continued to arise in ideas connected with the sublime following the publication of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* by Edmund Burke, an Irish political theorist and philosopher. In his groundbreaking study, Burke developed the thinking of writers such as Addison, Lord Shaftesbury, Baillie, and Mark Akenside (1721-1770), among others. He brought about a transition from Longinus's rhetorical sublimity and created a move towards a notion of the sublime in which the focus falls on objects and evolves to a focus on internal states: the imagination, the passions, and emotions.<sup>319</sup> It is the reaction of the human mind to 'emotive objects and experiences' with which Burke's *Enquiry* is concerned.<sup>320</sup> In terms of the sublime, and for the purpose of my thesis, internal states may be defined, initially, as emotions that are a reaction to any threat or challenge to human reason. This will have implications for future chapters of my thesis, which will consider the place of human reason along with the concepts of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum*. For the present, I will explore Burke's understanding of the sublime.

Burke's notion of the sublime lay in qualities such as obscurity, power, vacuity, darkness, solitude, silence, and vastness.<sup>321</sup> This thinking begins to develop Longinus's ideas on confrontation with the threatening or unknown. Qualities of the sublime, experienced mainly from a distance, conveyed ideas of pain and terror without causing actual physical danger.<sup>322</sup> In his Sections II and III on Pain and Pleasure, Burke posits that both pain and pleasure are of a 'positive nature' and are by no means dependent on each

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<sup>318</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 6.

<sup>319</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>320</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. xi.

<sup>321</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>322</sup> *The Blackwell Companion to the Enlightenment*, p. 508.

other for their existence. Interestingly, from his point of view he maintains that when the human mind is neither in a state of pain or pleasure, it then enters a state of indifference. It is from this state of indifference that pleasure and pain take hold, as he states:<sup>323</sup>

For when we have suffered from any violent emotion, the mind naturally continues in the same condition, after the cause which first produced it has ceased to operate. The tossing of the sea remains after the storm; and when this remain of horror has entirely subsided, all the passion, which the accident raised, subsides along with it; and the mind returns to its usual state of indifference.<sup>324</sup>

However, he shows that the sublime is an emotion aroused by something ‘terrible’ (i.e. literally, akin to terror or horror), such as the idea of pain or danger, and these feelings are stronger than pleasure. Indeed, they are the strongest the mind can sustain. Beyond that, though, is death which he sees as the ultimate and ‘king of terrors’ to which pain is more than likely to be an emissary. The strange dichotomy is that close up, pain and danger are incapable of giving delight and are ‘simply terrible’ but from that safe distance, of which Burke speaks, they can be ‘delightful’.<sup>325</sup>

Burke’s work was concerned with the dark side of the sublime, and the language he uses reflects this, the sublime being identified with ‘whatever is any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror’.<sup>326</sup> In considering the natural sublime, Burke speaks of ‘the great and sublime in nature capable of inciting fear and terror in the human mind’.<sup>327</sup> He further refers to passion, which is caused by the sublime in nature, resulting in ‘astonishment’, in which the state of the soul leads to feelings of terror, dread, and fear and in which its motions are suspended with some degree of horror.<sup>328</sup> Following his description of the sublime as invoking terror, Burke goes on to state that ‘the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it’.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>324</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>325</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 36.

<sup>326</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 36.

<sup>327</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 36.

<sup>328</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 53.

<sup>329</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 53.

Addison and Baillie had, as I have indicated earlier, anticipated this move from the object of the sublime to the experience of the beholder. Burke builds on this thinking, from rhetoric to nature and on to the mind, and in so doing draws closer to an idea of the numinous, which has a similar effect on the subject, leading to any attempt at reasoning to begin to look almost impossible.

Burke connects terror with the sublime by stating that ‘indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime’.<sup>330</sup> He describes fear as robbing the mind ‘of all its powers of acting and reasoning’.<sup>331</sup> An important point is that in order for the subject to experience delight there must be, as I explained earlier, a safe distance between the subject and the source of terror. However, this is not to say that reflection on the numinous does not take place in the mind of the subject, but rather it is likely to be a natural response to the terror that accompanies it. For Burke, then, terror is the ruling principle of the sublime. This thinking seems to me to resonate with the feelings and sensations of numinous experience and encounter with the *mysterium tremendum*, as described by Otto, which also incites fear and dread. But what more can be said about the nature of sublime experience? Burke, in his section on terror, turns to our conceptions of animals to help him to clarify his case. He refers to those animals that may not be large, yet are capable of inciting terror, for example poisonous snakes. He makes a comparison between an immense piece of land and the ocean, finding in the prospect of the ocean ‘an object of no small terror’.<sup>332</sup> He further refers to the passion, which is caused by the sublime in nature, resulting in ‘astonishment’: a state of the soul leading to feelings of terror, dread, and fear and in which its motions are suspended with some degree of horror.<sup>333</sup> The fact that Burke moves from the object of the sublime to the experience of the beholder is a leap forward in thinking about the sublime, bringing it a little nearer to the experience of the numinous that itself invokes the passions of fear, dread, terror, and horror.

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<sup>330</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p.54.

<sup>331</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 54.

<sup>332</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p.54.

<sup>333</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 53.

Burke explores the ways in which different languages use the same word to signify modes of astonishment, admiration, and terror. He refers to the Greek Θαμβος (*thambos*), meaning ‘amazement’, to describe the human response to the sublime. The word Θαμβος also means ‘to render immovable’ and is frequently associated with terror as well as astonishment.<sup>334</sup> This understanding of the word is also found in the New Testament, in reference to Jesus Christ: ‘They were all amazed and kept saying to one another: “what kind of utterance is this, for with authority he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come”!’<sup>335</sup> It is also found in the Acts of the Apostles: ‘and they recognised him [the man who was healed] as the one who used to sit and ask for alms [...] and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him’.<sup>336</sup> Burke also uses the Latin verb *stupeo*, which also means ‘amazed’, and explains its understanding as that which marks the state of an ‘astonished mind’.<sup>337</sup> Burke turns to an example from John Milton and his description of Death as ‘fierce as ten furies; terrible as hell’, and which is all that is ‘dark, uncertain, confused, terrible and sublime to the last degree’.<sup>338</sup> He cites as an example of idols in heathen temples that are kept in darkness, since anything ‘terrible’ he describes as generally requiring ‘obscurity’, since once the full extent of any danger is known and the eye becomes accustomed to it then fearful apprehension vanishes.<sup>339</sup>

These examples of what may be called sublime encounter emphasise experiences of coming too close to that which may be called sublime. Burke refers to ‘danger or pain’, which when they ‘press too nearly’ are incapable of evoking a sense of pleasure, but being at a distance they may be capable of conveying delight, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter.<sup>340</sup> Therefore, a certain distance from the sublime object enables the observer to enjoy the sublime experience while at the same time being safe. Pliny the Elder (79 CE) may have been seeking a sublime experience as he watched, from a distance, the destruction of Pompeii following the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which led to his boat

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<sup>334</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), pp. 24-25.

<sup>335</sup> Luke 4. 36.

<sup>336</sup> Acts of the Apostles 3.10.

<sup>337</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 54.

<sup>338</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 55.

<sup>339</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 54.

<sup>340</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 36-37.

being engulfed in the ash that fell from the volcano. Burke's enquiry was a psychological one, seeing the sublime as the strongest passion a human being is capable of and having the power to transform the self. He was interested in that which happens to the self in a sublime encounter and threatened the survival of the self. This seems to me to resonate with the feelings and sensations of numinous experience and an encounter with the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, as described by Otto.

## Conclusion

During the eighteenth century, many eminent theorists struggled with the concept of the sublime as they attempted to explore Longinus's *PeriHypsous*. John Dennis, with his noble intention of influencing and reforming the nation, made his contribution as he tried to place the sublime within a Christian framework. Joseph Addison helped to advance thinking on the sublime by encouraging a move from the rhetorical sublime to thoughts on the sublime in nature and the imagination. He also contrasted that which was great, uncommon, or beautiful with the sinister side of the sublime, which may be terrible, offensive, or loathsome. Part of John Baillie's contribution lay in his critique of Longinus and his shortcomings when attempting to explain the notion of the sublime. Baillie questioned what, in fact, the sublime was, and his reflections caused him to conclude that any natural object capable of raising the mind to fits of greatness can be called sublime. A further contribution made by Baillie was that there is some relationship between the vastness of the mind and the sights of nature. As he states, 'vast objects occasion vast sensations, and vast sensations give the mind a higher idea of her own powers'.<sup>341</sup> Baillie refers to the 'soul' as being aware of its own greatness by virtue of the deity whose 'universal presence' is a 'sublime attribute'. However, Baillie looks towards the 'reflections' occasioned by sublime experience, which lead to 'reflections' causing a deeper self-understanding and knowledge of the faculties.<sup>342</sup> For Baillie, sublimity does not reside in the object or in the mind, but rather, as Shaw shows, within the discourse that explains it, evidencing the transformational

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<sup>341</sup> John Baillie, 'An Essay on the Sublime' (1747). In Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p.89.

<sup>342</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 89.

power of language.<sup>343</sup> Baillie's thinking shows a shift in the understanding of the sublime, a development from fine writing and rhetoric to the majesty of the sensations, imagination, and language.

A further example of this shift in the understanding of the sublime is found in the writings of Richard Blackmore. Writing in 1716, Blackmore speaks of the 'sublimity of thoughts'. For him, the elevated mind, inspired by sublime thoughts, is able to impart 'heat, vigour and majesty to the narration', as choice words are selected in order to 'give outward richness, elegance and magnificence' to what is said.<sup>344</sup> In a similar vein, Burke writes of the influence of words upon the passions:

there are no tokens which can express all the circumstances of most passions so fully as words; so that if a person speaks on any subject, he can not only convey the subject to you, but likewise the manner in which he himself is affected by it.<sup>345</sup>

Burke's example gives an insight into the transformational power of words, which not only presents a subject for discussion but also gives some knowledge of the way in which the speaker is influenced.<sup>346</sup> As I have demonstrated earlier, Burke's thinking saw the sublime not only falling on objects but also on internal states. He attempts to show how the human mind is likely to react when imagination, passions, and emotions are involved. Burke spoke of terror and terrible objects inducing fear, but to ameliorate the caveat and be safe he introduced the idea of distance between the subject and that which is experienced as sublime. Part of my chapter considered whether terror is the ruling principle of the sublime but I would not, as yet, claim that it is since there are so many conflicting reasons why it may not be. However, I recognise that Dennis and Addison discovered, in the experience of the sublime, something akin to the numinous, which itself seems to arouse quite easily a sense of terror, and for that reason shows some relationship to the sublime. Sublime experience, although generally understood to be of a secular nature, has a duality. It veers between a type of joy and a type of terror. The concept of the sublime, however, is not limited to either a secular or a religious understanding. The responses of the human subject

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<sup>343</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 45.

<sup>344</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 41.

<sup>345</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 158.

<sup>346</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 41.

to the sublime have been chronicled by eighteenth-century theorists and contemporary thinkers alike, and in some detail, leading to a crisis in the human subject. As I explained at the outset of this chapter, human reason can fail in the face of the sublime, as in the case of the numinous, and what emerges is a division between a materialistic and a religious understanding of the sublime.

## Chapter Three

### Immanuel Kant: His Thoughts on the Sublime and Religion and Their Influence on Otto

In Chapter Two, I traced the development of the secular sublime from its inception in the writings of Longinus to its reception by eighteenth-century British and Irish theorists, including John Dennis, Joseph Addison, John Baillie, and Edmund Burke, all of whom had a significant influence on the unfolding of the secular sublime. These writers, in their different ways, made their contribution to the development of the concept of the sublime and to its effects on the human mind.

Dennis, an enlightenment thinker, differentiated between those passions that are concerned with the ordinary things of life and *enthusiasm*, which is concerned with a deeper contemplation of natural objects. He showed that the mind was capable of acting on its reflection of nature in order to elevate thinking to a state of the sublime. Although he was dissatisfied with Longinus's description of the sublime, complaining that it lacked consistency, he nevertheless praised the portrayal of the effects of the sublime on the mind, seeing it as capable of lifting the mind out of ordinariness and filling it with 'joy' and 'astonishment'.<sup>347</sup> However, Dennis's main contribution to the sublime was an attempt to locate it within a religious context, as discussed in Chapter Two, and this was in keeping with Longinus's own thinking, when he pointed to the words in the book of Genesis that refer to the act of Creation: 'and God said, let there be light'.<sup>348</sup>

In Chapter Two, I also showed how Joseph Addison considered the effects of 'vastness' on the imagination. Addison's writings emphasise contrasts, for example between that which embodies the greatness or beauty of a thing and also its antithesis, which may be repulsive and yet still be capable, in the midst of abhorrence, of engendering pleasure. References in Addison's work suggest that he is worthy of consideration as a forerunner to both Burke and Kant. He speaks of nature's 'high rocks and precipices' and

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<sup>347</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 34.

<sup>348</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 152.

the essential and necessary safe ‘distance’ from an object of terror, which were to be themes in the work of both Burke and Kant. A movement from the rhetorical sublime to the sublime in nature formed part of Addison’s theory of the sublime.

I gave some consideration to John Baillie’s thoughts on the sublime and his question as to what the sublime actually is. Just as Dennis had done, Baillie also found Longinus’s explanation regarding the nature of the sublime to be inadequate. This inadequacy he saw as an opportunity for speculation and thus gave priority to his reflection upon sublime objects before considering the value of rhetoric. Baillie broadened the spectrum that allowed a paradigm shift from rhetoric to nature and ultimately to the mind. As a result of these theories, I sought to show how their thinking, although not related to religious awe, may yet be considered to have some association with Otto’s thought since he speaks of associated ideas attracting one another.<sup>349</sup> The sublime, therefore, would appear to resonate with the numinous in Otto’s thought. As I established in Chapter One, Otto had respect for the sublime but still found it fell far short of the impact created by numinous experience.

In Chapter One, I also sought to relate some of Otto’s thinking on the concepts of the rational and non-rational in human experience to what has been written on the sublime, and I considered the specific language relating to both phenomena. I alluded to the association between holiness and morality, which emerged in the writings of both Kant and Otto, and raised the question about the place of reason in philosophical and religious thinking. I examined the extent to which terror is seen as a ruling principle of the sublime and to what greater or lesser degree the numinous, as found in Otto’s text, shares the experience.

I analysed Burke’s ground breaking work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, which is concerned with ‘the responses of the human mind to emotive objects and experiences’.<sup>350</sup> As his work developed, so too did his assertion that those experiences which arouse feelings of fear and danger are a source of the sublime. I emphasised Burke’s stress on the importance of distance between the subject

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<sup>349</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 42.

<sup>350</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. xi.

and the object of the sublime, as intimated earlier by Addison. I explained that the sublime could be enjoyed without the immediate danger that it presented, since in this case delight is produced when terror does not come too close. As some groundwork has been achieved by the eighteenth-century theorists to whom I have referred, I shall now turn my attention to the consideration of Kant's thoughts on the sublime, endeavouring to discover what influence, if any, he had upon Otto's thinking. I begin with Kant's views on the sublime and the beautiful.

Although Kant saw some agreement between the sublime and the beautiful, in terms of 'pleasing on their own account', he describes the beautiful in nature as existing in the:

form of the object while the sublime is to be found even in a formless object, insofar as we present *unboundedness*, either [as] in the object or because the object prompts us to present it, while we add to this unboundedness the thought of its totality.<sup>351</sup>

Here, Kant makes a clear division between that which may be called beautiful and that which is sublime. However, the nature of my study is such that I will not be considering the beautiful in any detail, but instead will refer to it only occasionally in an attempt to exemplify other areas of Kant's thinking. This chapter will, therefore, concentrate chiefly on Kant's ideas of the sublime, his views on religion, and their implications for later thought, especially in relation to Otto. It is helpful at this point to reiterate a general understanding of the sublime, which can be described as something that causes us to experience a sense of awe. Such a sense can fill a person with fear, which is often mingled with reverence, especially in Otto's thought. The experience, which can embody mystery and arguably relate it to the transcendent, serves to set it apart from normal everyday feelings. It can, however, be said to be something like the numinous, which also inspires the subject with a sense of awe. An association between the idea of the sublime and the numinous will, therefore, form part of my argument as it progresses. A helpful model of Kant's theory of the sublime is found in Costelloe's edited work, *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, in which Merritt introduces Kant's Taxonomy of Terms, which relate to the concept of the sublime and highlight specific aspects of the concept discoverable in Kant's theory.

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<sup>351</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 98.

## **Kant's modes of the sublime and the moral law**

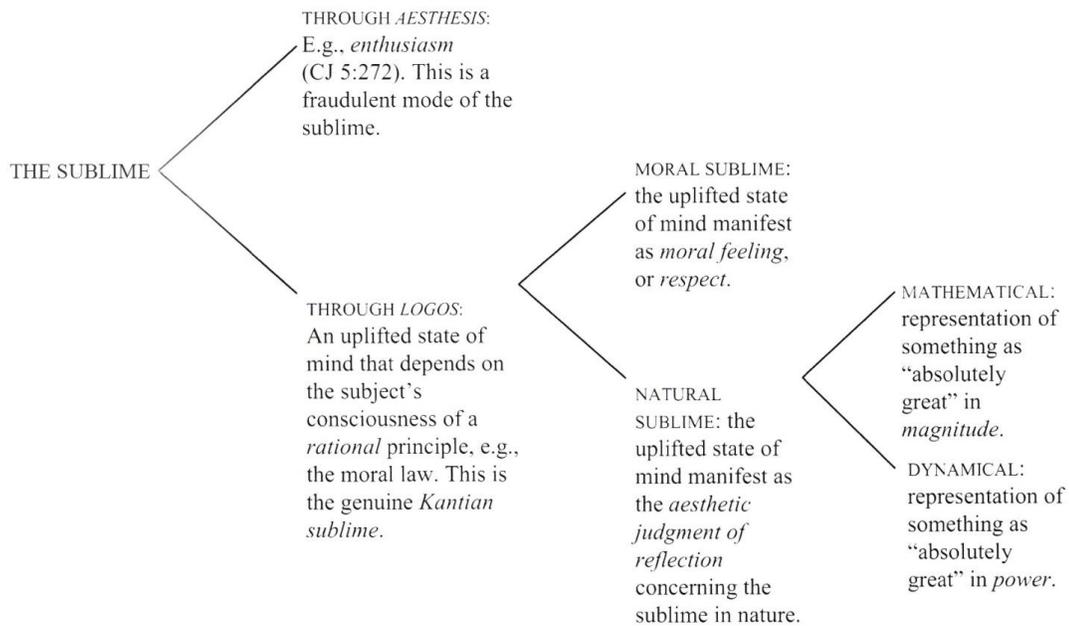
Defining Kant's view of the sublime through *aesthesis*, Merritt gives as an example *enthusiasm*, which Kant claims is a 'fraudulent mode of the sublime'.<sup>352</sup> However, this depends on how *enthusiasm* is understood, and some explanation for Merritt's use of the word is necessary. If *aesthesis* is defined as a process of perceiving then it may be difficult to link it with *enthusiasm*. The word *enthusiasm* (from the Greek *enthusiasmos*) is understood, as I discussed in Chapter Two when considering the views of eighteenth-century theorists, to have some relationship to divine inspiration. It is difficult to ascertain what Merritt means exactly when she makes a connection between *aesthesis* and *enthusiasm*. However, the significance of the point she makes is that Kant rejects the approach through *aesthesis* to the sublime and sees it as a false perception. Another mode of the sublime occurs through *logos*, which denotes an elevated mental state dependent upon the subject's awareness of a 'rational principle', and an example of this Merritt suggests may be 'the moral law'. Merritt's use of the word *logos* initially appears to be inappropriate in this context, as *logos* is a transliteration of the Greek word (*logos*) meaning 'word', which is used in the first chapter of the Gospel of St John to refer to Jesus Christ. However, on further consideration, it is in fact suitable since its Greek root suggests 'the expression of thought' and a 'conception or idea'.<sup>353</sup> For Merritt, this mode is understood to be the authentic Kantian sublime since it arises from the moral law as a rational principle. A further example of Kant's terms is the moral sublime, which is a state of mind exhibited as a 'moral feeling' or 'respect'. Experience of the sublime in nature finds its root in 'the aesthetic judgement of reflection'. The modes of the sublime continue towards the mathematically sublime, where an object is represented as 'absolutely great' in size, and also the dynamically sublime, which arises from that which is 'absolutely great' in terms of *power*.<sup>354</sup> These modes of the sublime, which appear in the figure below, will receive further consideration as this chapter progresses.

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<sup>352</sup> Merritt, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 46.

<sup>353</sup> Vine, *Complete Expository Dictionary*, p. 683.

<sup>354</sup> Merritt, in *The Sublime from Antiquity to the Present*, p. 47.



### Kant's Taxonomy of Terms<sup>355</sup>

Burnham notes Kant's views on the sublime and its relation to the moral law, where sublime experience not only requires a sensitivity to what reason demands in a given situation, but also that the moral law is adhered to and respected. Burnham discovers some kind of hierarchy in Kant's thinking on the sublime, in which such experience is available only for those who inhabit a certain moral culture within which their experience can eventually benefit their culture. As he states, 'that which leads in a civilised person to a feeling of the sublime leads, in an uncultured person, to mere terror'.<sup>356</sup> What is needed, therefore, is a certain perception and a responsiveness to reason's intimations in order to enter into the sublime experience properly. This is all very different from what may be said about the sense of the numinous. While one can understand that a sense of the sublime can be instigated in the mind by a certain aesthetic background and even the inclination to engage in such a pursuit, there is no indication in Otto's idea of the holy that numinous

<sup>355</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 47.

<sup>356</sup> Douglas Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant's Critique of Judgement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 134-35.

experience is limited to a particular culture. Otto simply suggests, as I mentioned in Chapter One, that the mind of the reader should be capable of turning to ‘a moment of deeply felt religious feeling’.<sup>357</sup> However, it has to be acknowledged that for many, such an occupation of the mind may not be possible. For Kant, though, sublimity is something that originates in the mind and I now consider his argument in this respect.

### **Sublimity’s dwelling place**

Kant disapproves of the temptation to call natural objects sublime, insisting that the source of sublimity dwells in the mind. As he states, ‘we are entitled to say that the object is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind’.<sup>358</sup> This is an important point that could be said to reflect Otto’s description of the numinous, especially in respect of his ideas on the *mysterium tremendum*, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Kant, however, understands the experience of the sublime as having two stages, starting with counter-purposeness and then moving on to displeasure. Counter-purposeness can be described as a feeling that the object of our focus is contrary and unsuited to our faculties of sense and cognition, and so the subject experiences a type of violence to the imagination.<sup>359</sup> In terms of the sensation of displeasure, this is somehow overcome and the subject eventually experiences that which is pleasurable to the mind. In my discussion in Chapter One, I showed how Kant attempted to bring fresh vision to ways in which the sublime might be understood when he introduced the idea of reason and its limits into the analysis of the concept, and I now go on to explore his ideas further.

### **The concept of reason**

The category of reason has significance, both in relation to how Kant understands the sublime and for Otto’s thinking on the numinous, a concept that I will go on to explore in

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<sup>357</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 8.

<sup>358</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 99.

<sup>359</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 99.

more detail in this and subsequent chapters. In his example of the sublime as found in the natural world, Kant, like Burke, speaks of a raging storm, with thunder, lightning, crashing waves, and those things that can overwhelm us with their might and power, and over which we have no control. He shows that it is in its wildest, most chaotic, and most irregular disorder and desolation that nature has the propensity to excite ideas of the sublime.<sup>360</sup> Unlike the beautiful in nature, which is to do with the form of the object and consists in limitation, the sublime, as I stated earlier, does not rely on an object's form. On the contrary, it can lie in an object lacking any form but representing limitlessness, while at the same time invoking a thought of its totality.<sup>361</sup> Therefore, a stormy sea can give the appearance of limitlessness, but Kant would not call it sublime since, according to his thinking, nothing in nature can be properly considered sublime.<sup>362</sup> However, that which does cause ideas of the sublime to surface is the 'magnitude and might' of the disorder and desolation presented to the mind of the subject.<sup>363</sup> The sublime, therefore, exercises its function in the mind, and thus it is what Burnham called 'a feeling completely internal to the subject', when attempting to explain Kant's position.<sup>364</sup> Such thinking is in contrast to ideas of the beautiful in nature, which require that we look outside of ourselves, a point to which I will return in due course in this chapter. Kant's attitude to sublime objects is that they serve only as illustrations for the all-important faculty of reason. For Kant, reason is that cognitive faculty that transcends sensual apprehension. The sublime, therefore, is better sought in ideas of the mind, where reason can be brought into play rather than in aspects of nature. A sense of pleasure is called forth at the point where the object, whether beautiful or sublime, is presented to the mind. However, when it comes to engaging reason in apprehension of the sublime, we are left, in Kant's thinking, with a dichotomy between conceiving of limitlessness and totality.

As a further corollary to this point and bearing in mind Otto's conception of the numinous as that which cannot be taught but only 'awakened' in the mind, as I explained earlier in this chapter, it is useful to consider how Kant differentiates between the beautiful,

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<sup>360</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>361</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 98.

<sup>362</sup> Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant's Critique of Judgement*, p. 90.

<sup>363</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 100.

<sup>364</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 100.

an appreciation of which can be outside of ourselves, and the sublime, which demands that we seek an explanation within ourselves.<sup>365</sup> It is important to understand that the sublime, like the numinous, throws us into some kind of turmoil since boundaries disappear and reason is called upon to try to make sense of the confusion. However, the numinous and *mysterium tremendum*, as presented by Otto in terms of ‘awefulness’ and ‘overpoweringness’, challenge reason to its limit, if not beyond, presuming such a thing is possible. It seems that Kant, for all his respect of human reason, can speak of it being humiliated when faced with the task of discerning truth ‘by means of pure speculation’, and finds itself lacking in competence. He recognises that the concept of reason requires some regulation ‘to check its deviations from the straight path and to expose the illusions which it originates’.<sup>366</sup> However, Kant also recognises that this constraining discipline is imposed by reason itself being ‘subject to the censure of no other power’.<sup>367</sup> Here Kant answers his own question and is still able to maintain a place of privilege and power for human reason, which emerged as a self-critique and as a guardian against the erroneous, and thus is able to have the last word over imagination and understanding.

### **Reason, imagination, and understanding**

Just as Kant’s conception of sublime encounter begins with the imagination, which is overwhelmed by the object of the sublime, so the imagination is also engaged in apprehension of the numinous. The understanding, incapable of providing a concept to ‘match’ the object, relies upon reason to come to the rescue. So it is a failure of the imagination, as Crockett is able to discern, that leaves the understanding in its wake.<sup>368</sup> Kant puts it in this way:

Just as the aesthetic power of judgement in judging the beautiful refers the imagination [...] to the understanding, so that it will harmonize with the

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<sup>365</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 60.

<sup>366</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. by Vasilis Politis (London: Orion Publishing Group, 1993), p.513.

<sup>367</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 513.

<sup>368</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 78.

understanding's concepts [...] so in judging a thing sublime it refers the imagination to reason so that it will harmonize with reason's *ideas*.<sup>369</sup>

When the subject is faced with the challenge of satisfying the need to judge an object and reach some harmonious synthesis in the mind, a measure of harmony between the imagination and the understanding is crucial in determining a suitable outcome. Crockett speaks of a 'synthesis of recognition', which is the 'reflective judgement' necessary to apprehend forms in the imagination.<sup>370</sup> In this respect, Merritt makes a helpful suggestion when she claims that it is an examination by the human mind of itself.<sup>371</sup> In other words, it is human reason searching its own 'cognitive capacity' in order to make sense of experience. This is, again, reminiscent of Otto's ideas in respect of the *mysterium tremendum* in relation to the numinous. The subject, overwhelmed by the experience, attempts via reason to discover an explanation. Here there is some evidence of Otto's dependence on Kant and his 'aesthetic judgement' as opposed to 'logical judgement'.<sup>372</sup>

Merritt goes on to speak of a struggle between the imagination and reason in Kant's aesthetic theory, a conflict that presents difficulty and cannot be overcome while we are 'both rational and animal'.<sup>373</sup> She continues to develop the dichotomy that arises from Kant's point of view, which creates a conflict between the repulsion felt by what morality demands as opposed to the attraction presented by the desire to achieve rationality through the moral law.<sup>374</sup> There is a further attempt to bring some understanding to Kant's ideas of this by tracing it to its roots in the moral psychology of what Merritt calls the 'rational animal'.<sup>375</sup> As I explained earlier, there is a connection in Kant's thinking between the moral and a certain sublimity of mind.<sup>376</sup> Some relationship can be detected here with his thinking that principles of morality are discovered *a priori* (meaning independent or before) by human reason, not necessarily resulting from human experience but presenting certain standards of conduct irrespective of the human state and needs. However, in order to bring

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<sup>369</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 113.

<sup>370</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 79.

<sup>371</sup> Merritt, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 38, n. 6.

<sup>372</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 148.

<sup>373</sup> Merritt in *The Sublime from Antiquity to the Present*, p.39.

<sup>374</sup> Merritt, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>375</sup> Merritt, in *The Sublime from Antiquity to the Present*, p.39.

<sup>376</sup> Merritt, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 39.

reason into play, there is a necessary route according to Kant from the imagination to understanding and eventually to reason. The role of the imagination is to represent sensible things but this is challenged by our ability to represent the supersensible, defined as that which lies beyond anything perceived by the senses, namely our reason. Does this then raise the question of judgement, which is itself challenged? As Kant shows, it is when reason is brought into play that ‘aesthetic judgements of reflection’ become relevant. They are not ‘based upon concepts at all and thus cannot be derived from any determinate principle, for in that case they would be logical judgements’.<sup>377</sup> In respect of Kant’s view of reason, Paul Guyer comments that he had, in hoping for success with his *Critique of Reason*, presented a clear distinction between the understanding and the ‘purely systematic idea of reason’.<sup>378</sup> Such a distinction, Guyer notes, was difficult to maintain and he recognises in Kant’s own words some acknowledgement of this.<sup>379</sup> Crockett, in *A Theology of the Sublime*, refers to Heidegger’s suggestion that imagination occupies a place as ‘a mediating faculty between sensibility and understanding’.<sup>380</sup> It is what Kant had referred to as a ‘transcendental synthesis of imagination’, which is the pre-requisite for the possibility of experience.<sup>381</sup> Shaw picks up on Kant’s development of his ‘transcendent’ argument, describing the *a priori* terms of knowledge that it features.<sup>382</sup> The existence and nature of the *a priori* relies on human thought, which is required to transcend that which may be called sensible apprehension of a given condition, which in turn leads to the active involvement of the imagination and understanding.

A crucial part of this ‘transcendental’ argument is the importance of Kant’s ideas concerning the faculty of understanding. There is a resultant *synthesis* as sensible intuition is presented through the faculty of imagination. Eventually, the ‘harmony’ of which I spoke earlier prevails between the imagination and the understanding, and there is a drawing together of nature and concepts.<sup>383</sup> We are left to struggle, therefore, in the continuation of Kant’s argument, with the sublime, the reason, and aesthetic judgements,

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<sup>377</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 345.

<sup>378</sup> Guyer, *Cambridge Companion*, p.421.

<sup>379</sup> Guyer, *Cambridge Companion*, p. 421.

<sup>380</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>381</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 110.

<sup>382</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 74.

<sup>383</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 74.

and to make an attempt to discern how they work together in the mind in order to make sense of experience. How, then, can one negotiate a path through sublime and numinous experiences, which can be threatening as well as delightful, and still be assured of safety, while bearing in mind the possible risks presented by these categories?

### **The sublime and the numinous – at a distance**

My explorations of the sublime in Chapter Two revealed that John Dennis and Edmund Burke found safety in distance from sublime objects. Kant also speaks of sublime objects in nature that can overwhelm the human subject, and yet contemplation of them can evoke a sense of pleasure if we are in a safe place and at a distance from them. However, he also looks to some ‘courage [to believe] that we could be a match for nature’s seeming impotence’.<sup>384</sup> Such power he gives to reason and its ability to claim superiority over nature. It is in the mind, as I have already established, that Kant finds sublimity.<sup>385</sup> Similarly, the numinous for Otto finds its source in the mind, and I shall now go on to further consider this thinking in Otto and Kant.

In his discussion on the numinous state of mind, Otto claims that it is in a class of its own, unlike any other, and thus is unique and particular. He suggests that in order to help another to understand it, a path must be found, with guidance through the other’s mind ‘until he reach[es] the point at which the numinous in him [...] begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness’.<sup>386</sup> The nature of the sublime is such that it can assault the mind of the subject, defying reason, and yet because of its aspect of fascination an attempt at engagement is desired. It would be natural to assume that when seeking to experience sublimity one may put oneself in physical danger, as I discussed in Chapter Two when considering Dennis’s approach to the concept and the risk of the subject getting too close to a hazardous prospect. However, Kant shows that in order to experience sublimity one needs to be on the edge of safety and it is at that point sublimity is revealed.<sup>387</sup> One’s

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<sup>384</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p.120.

<sup>385</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 120.

<sup>386</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.

<sup>387</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 120.

experience of the sublime can then be enjoyed without fear or trepidation. Kant objects to any claim that the theory of the sublime is more than ‘a mere appendix to our aesthetic judging of the purposiveness of nature’ and goes on to affirm that it is ‘the imagination’ that makes use of what is presented by nature in order to make sense of it.<sup>388</sup> The imagination, then, is required to approach the difficulty presented by the sublime experience and to work assiduously to garner some meaning from a consciousness of the sublime. I shall, in Chapter Five, focus on the sense of awe experienced when the sublime is encountered and present more detailed thinking on its relationship to the numinous. For the present, however, I will continue to investigate Kant’s understanding of the sublime. The earlier examples I noted, of chaos and disorder, allude to what Kant, in his ‘Analytic of the Sublime’, calls the dynamically sublime in nature. I now go on to explore both the dynamically and the mathematically sublime, which for Kant ‘present the object as sublime in these two ways’.<sup>389</sup>

### **The dynamically and mathematically sublime**

Kant differentiates between the mathematically and the dynamically sublime, a distinction that enables him to explain the two types of sublime experience. Firstly, the mathematically sublime engages with the idea of scale or magnitude, and it initiates a process in the mind that leads to the intuition of an object. The dynamically sublime is somewhat similar to its mathematical counterpart but comes into action when a response to an experience overwhelms the subject, initiating a sense of the power and force of nature rather than scale or magnitude. To be more precise, Kant associates the mathematically sublime with any experience that overpowers the subject by the immensity of its size, while the dynamically sublime he sees as an experience of the sublime that is distinctive in its ability to overwhelm the subject by the greatness of its power. An example Kant gives is the appearance of the Great Pyramids of Egypt, the result of human effort capable of evoking a sense of the sublime. These impressive human-made creations are capable of taking the breath away and instilling in the subject a sense of astonishment. He also makes a

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<sup>388</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 100.

<sup>389</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 101.

reference to the ‘bewilderment’ and ‘perplexity’ which disturbs the mind of the visitor to St Peter’s in Rome. In their amazement, the subject discovers the inadequacy of their imagination to comprehend rightly the totality of the scene before them. It is not sufficient to conceive of the magnitude of the spectacle partially, but when the imagination is languishing, retreats, and fails to present the idea as a whole, then the imagination becomes outraged.<sup>390</sup> However, Kant eventually finds an ‘emotional delight’ in the complex experience for the spectator who has endured the trial of a stagnant and offended imagination. This brings us back to reason and imagination. As I have shown, a problem arises when the imagination fails to comprehend the sublime, and when this occurs reason is called upon to rationalise that which is presented to the imagination and some level of understanding ensues that pacifies the outraged imagination. Burnham describes the ‘outrages’ presented to the imagination, and the will by the mathematical and dynamic characteristics of the sublime in this way: ‘The former outrages our imagination because we cannot “take it all in at once”; the latter “outrages” our will because we know that, as sensibly conditioned beings, we are helpless before it’.<sup>391</sup> There is a move, then, from the object of the sublime to the experience of the spectator. This aspect of the sublime and its relationship to religion, in Kant’s thought, I will now examine further.

### **Kant’s moral faith and the religious element**

Robert Doran reports that Kant was interested in the religious aspect of the sublime and refers to Allen W. Wood’s comment in *Kant’s Ethical Thought*: ‘Kant is fundamentally a religious thinker. For his highest hopes for human history are pinned on religious values and religious institutions’.<sup>392</sup> Thus, religious thinking does find a place in Kant’s thought, and Burnham shows that when Kant presented his lectures he asked the following questions:

1. What can I know?

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<sup>390</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>391</sup> Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant’s Critique of Judgement*, p. 91.

<sup>392</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 255.

2. What ought I to do?
3. What may I hope?
4. What is man?<sup>393</sup>

Question two concerns morality and question three concerns religion. These questions, for Kant, as Burnham shows, require a response and are the necessary and fundamental issues human beings should raise and seek to answer, as they are of interest to everyone.<sup>394</sup> For the purpose of my inquiry into Kant's religious thought, I will focus on questions two and three since these are to do with morality and religion and will help in creating a link between that which Kant taught and any influence he may have had on Otto.

Kant's moral faith emerges as he examines the dynamically sublime in nature. He sets up a scenario using religion as an example, and so speaks of a 'virtuous person' who 'fears God' and yet is not afraid of God. Looking at Kant's ideas of God in this way requires some explanation of what it means to *fear* God. The word 'fear' in this context is surely more to do with a healthy respect that recognises the possible overwhelming might of such a being. However, for Kant, it is at this point that the power of reason becomes active, and although we may recognise 'our physical impotence' we can still 'judge ourselves independent of nature'.<sup>395</sup> Nature's dominance, therefore, fails to get complete control over us since Kant, who always seems to promote the superiority of human reason, sees it as capable of making an appropriate aesthetic judgement. Kant continues his argument by affirming his belief that sublimity finds its source in the mind. At the end of chapter twenty eight of his *Critique of Judgement*, Kant reaches a type of crescendo, describing sublimity as 'contained not in any thing of nature, but only in our mind'.<sup>396</sup> Kant also speaks of 'that being' who causes us to feel a sense of 'deep respect' at the glories of nature and the wondrous abilities we have to make a profound and fearless judgement of nature. The human condition he understands to be 'above nature'.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant's Critique of Judgement*, p. 1.

<sup>394</sup> Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant's Critique of Judgement*, p. 1.

<sup>395</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>396</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 123.

<sup>397</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 123.

Although Kant refers to a supernatural being, his focus, in terms of religion, found its nexus in the dynamically sublime. Doran questions whether, in terms of religious thinking, it may have been more appropriate if Kant had emphasised the mathematically sublime for his reflections. However, he goes on to recognise that Kant, no doubt, found that traditionally the idea of God had been linked with ideas of terror and power, especially in the writings of Burke and Dennis.<sup>398</sup> I agree with Kant's choice to associate the dynamically sublime with the idea of the divine, especially in respect of Otto's later writing which placed the numinous 'In the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures'.<sup>399</sup> It is that association with something, the nature of which is ultimately transcendent, with which the numinous and the dynamically sublime are also concerned.

A further definition of the sublime, whether mathematical or dynamical, may be as a sensation associated with something that overwhelms us. Kant explains it in this way: 'the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that only arises indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful'.<sup>400</sup> He goes on to state that it is 'seriousness, rather than play, in the imagination's activity'.<sup>401</sup> Here Kant is presenting and re-stating his case for sublimity emanating from the mind; it is the impact of the object on the mind that evokes a sense of the sublime.<sup>402</sup> Once again, some reference can be made to Otto's idea of the experience of the numinous, since that also can be the result of the impression made by the numinous object on the mind. Otto calls the mental state *sui generis*, in other words within a category that is totally unique and peculiar, unlike anything else.<sup>403</sup> He places it within primary and elementary data that although is capable of being discussed, as I stated earlier, nevertheless still eludes any positive definition. It is this elusive numinosity, the powerful and essential holiness of the divine, which constitutes the nature of the numinous object. We have considered the sublime object, but what is the numinous object?

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<sup>398</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 255.

<sup>399</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 13.

<sup>400</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 98.

<sup>401</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 98

<sup>402</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 99.

<sup>403</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.

## **The numinous object as an object of faith and Kant's idea of schematisation**

In the Ottonian context, the numinous object is the object of faith, met unexpectedly in an awesome encounter between a believer and the quintessential holiness of the deity. For Otto, as Melissa Raphael shows, there is a clear dissension between the object of holiness and the morality of the human subject. Nevertheless, although such dissension occurs there is recognition that morality is a necessary component of religion. Otto therefore displays a compulsion to bring about a unity between the two: the *numen praesens*<sup>404</sup> and the morality of the subject whose reaction to the sacred presence is likely to be of an emotional nature.<sup>405</sup> This links in with Otto's idea of 'creature consciousness', a subject on which I have written in Chapter One, and describes the overwhelming emotion of a creature whose experience leads to a sense of nothingness in the face of what he calls 'that which is supreme above all creatures'.<sup>406</sup> With these two ideas in mind, therefore, there is a need, as Otto seems to understand, for some reconciliation between the two sides in the conflict. In order to bring this about, Otto moves on to speak of 'schematisation'. This psychological activity engages with the ways in which ideas are associated with one another and how connections are made and thinking is regulated. In Otto's argument, the relation discoverable in the notions of rational and non-rational relating to ideas of holiness are the results of schematisation.<sup>407</sup> Otto develops his argument to show that there is a place for the sublime in such a schematisation and goes so far as to suggest a certain combining of the two, beyond 'a mere association of feelings' as they are awakened in the mind. He claims that more advanced religions find a place for a conjoining of the two and admits the sublime to the schema of 'the holy'.<sup>408</sup> This is a crucial point for my study in terms of attempting to discover whether there is any place for claiming a relationship between the two.

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<sup>404</sup> Translated as 'sacred presence'; Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 121.

<sup>405</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 121.

<sup>406</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 22.

<sup>407</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 45.

<sup>408</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 45-46.

It is arguable as to whether Otto was able to gain any benefit from Kant's ideas on schematisation. Raphael reports that there is some consensus among writers that Otto's use of the Kantian term is open to challenge since for Kant, schematism is 'a process in which the data of sense experience become intelligible by their subsumption under the rational categories of understanding, such as causality or substance'.<sup>409</sup> For Otto, though, the schema incorporates not only the awakened numinous consciousness but also a moral element that exists alongside the *sui generis* numinous experience. The wider content of the schema that exists in the mind, especially that of 'feeling', has 'numerous analogies with others' and therefore becomes effective stimulation for the sense of the numinous.<sup>410</sup> Otto seeks to discover how these 'stimuli' or 'excitations' take effect upon the consciousness in order to cause a sense of the numinous to emerge. At this point, Otto seeks some relationship between the sublime and the numinous. The answer for him lies in the law that governs and characterises both the sublime and the numinous and that he relates to religion. As he states:

But this is only a stimulus that makes its appearance late in the excitation-series, and it is probable that the feeling of the sublime is itself first aroused and disengaged by the precedent religious feeling—not from itself, but from the rational spirit of man and its *a priori* capacity.<sup>411</sup>

This is quite a significant claim from Otto and places the sense of the sublime within a religious context. For Kant though, the answer requires the faculty of reason to intervene and he exalts this capacity of the human mind as it mediates between, and reconciles it, through our understanding, to that which is presented by our imagination. As I have explained earlier in this chapter, Kant describes the sublime as: 'an object (of nature) the presentation of which determines the mind to think of nature's inability to attain to an exhibition of ideas'.<sup>412</sup> To try to explain this, he states that 'ideas cannot be presented, but

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<sup>409</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>410</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 44.

<sup>411</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 44.

<sup>412</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 127.

with the enlargement of our empirical faculty of representation reason intervenes to make sensuous representations adequate to ideas'.<sup>413</sup>

In a section entitled *Comment*, Kant develops his argument in relation to reason, stating that it 'would greatly deserve elaborate treatment in transcendental philosophy'.<sup>414</sup> He explains that reason is 'a faculty of principles', which has as its aim that which he calls 'the unconditioned', and has some, if limited, control over the understanding. However, a certain amount of conflict emerges between the reason and the understanding since the former is capable of becoming transcendent and showing itself 'not in objectively valid concepts, but instead in ideas'.<sup>415</sup> Kant clearly held the faculty of reason in high esteem, suggesting that the understanding is at its disposal but only to a certain extent. If reason begins to override the understanding then it becomes extravagant, meaning that it exhibits itself in ideas that, although they have a basis as regulative principles, no longer operate in objectively valid concepts.<sup>416</sup> The understanding begins to appear negative and passive in the face of the legislative reason with which the understanding fails to keep up.<sup>417</sup> Burnham points out that reason has 'no constitutive role in knowledge but only a regulative role that takes the initiative in helping to expand our knowledge'.<sup>418</sup> I will turn again to Otto for a moment, and try to discover whether Kant's ideas on the place of human reason, imagination, and understanding had any bearing on his thinking in terms of the rational and the non-rational.

### **Further thought on the non-rational**

As stated in Chapter One, the non-rational was a concept for which Otto sought to find a place and respect for in religious thinking. In consideration of this, he discovered some support for his own theological position in Kant's thought. Discussing the elements of terror and dread in the sixth chapter of the writings of the prophet Isaiah, to which I also

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<sup>413</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 127-28.

<sup>414</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p.283.

<sup>415</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 284.

<sup>416</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 284.

<sup>417</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 284.

<sup>418</sup> Burnham, *An Introduction to Kant's Critique of Judgement*, p. 23.

referred in Chapter One, he claims that there is sublimity present in that encounter. In fact, he goes further, claiming:

While the element of ‘dread’ is gradually overcome, the connection of the ‘sublime’ and ‘the holy’ becomes firmly established as a legitimate schematization and is carried on into the highest forms of religious consciousness – a proof that there exists a hidden kinship between the numinous and the sublime which is something more than a merely accidental analogy, and to which Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* bears distant witness.<sup>419</sup>

At this point, and in light of Kant’s thinking, it is worth considering how Kant’s projection of reason may have had implications for Otto’s thinking. Otto, on the nature of God, tells us that our thinking on the subject is ‘by analogy with our human nature of reason and personality’.<sup>420</sup> In other words, Otto is suggesting that a human conception of God is governed by similarities found in humankind. Some of these characteristics are ‘spirit, reason, purpose, good will, supreme power, unity, selfhood’.<sup>421</sup> With this point, Otto seems to indicate that any attempt to think outside analogies found in human nature is inconceivable when endeavouring to describe the deity. Again, and in other words, he is suggesting that humankind, if contemplating the deity, can only do so in terms of understandable and recognisable similarities with human nature and experience. This has some implication for his thinking in relation to the *mysterium tremendum*, where the subject is faced with the mysteriousness of God. He claims that the ‘truly mysterious’ is ‘beyond our apprehension and comprehension’, and this he attributes to the limitations of our knowledge as well as the irrational response humankind gives to any experience of the wholly other, ‘whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own’.<sup>422</sup> Otto’s definition of the wholly other is explained in the following way:

Taken in the religious sense, that which is ‘mysterious’ is – to give it perhaps the most striking expression – the ‘wholly other’ (ἄλλοτερον, *anyad*, *alienum*), that which is beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore

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<sup>419</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 63.

<sup>420</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p.1.

<sup>421</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 1.

<sup>422</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 28.

falls quite outside the limits of the ‘canny’ and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment.<sup>423</sup>

In Chapter One I pointed out that Otto’s thinking on certain issues indicated that he had come under Kant’s influence. He showed some admiration for Kant’s approach in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where the latter explores the concept of God in human reason.<sup>424</sup> In that work, Kant had presented an argument that resonated with Otto’s own claim that knowledge is rooted in experience. However, Kant further elucidated this by stating that knowledge did not necessarily come about as a *result* of experience. This was the point at which Otto could connect with Kant’s thinking, since his own argument was based on a view that there is a non-rational element in religion that is, nevertheless, rooted in experience.<sup>425</sup> On the other hand, much of Kant’s argument derives from an idealist position that claims that our sense of reality is determined wholly or in part by the structure of our minds. Earlier in this chapter I examined this stance when I considered the tripartite cognitive faculties of imagination, understanding, and reason. Kant’s thinking had moved away, as Shaw shows, ‘from empiricist or naturalistic theories towards the analysis of sublimity as a mode of consciousness’.<sup>426</sup> This agrees with his argument in favour of giving the prime place to the faculty of human reason in controlling the imagination and understanding. Otto emerges as having respect for Kant’s position while maintaining a partial empiricist stance, more akin to that of Burke. However, Otto’s thinking is firmly rooted in his attitude to that which he calls holy and this is either something like the experience of the sublime or something completely different, since it speaks of a deity.

Even so, and although as a general rule the sublime is more likely to be understood as a secular experience, Otto maintains that there is some affinity between the two. As he states, ‘there is more [...] in the combination of “the holy” with “the sublime” than a mere association of feelings’.<sup>427</sup> Such a claim suggests a theological aspect of the sublime, and Crockett, when alluding to Kant’s point of view, also makes a comparison between the sublime and the holy. There is, he observes, a tension in Kant’s thinking, especially in the

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<sup>423</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 26.

<sup>424</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 113.

<sup>425</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 3.

<sup>426</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 6.

<sup>427</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 45.

*Critique of Pure Reason*, a tension that Crockett calls ‘theological’. He claims that this propels Kant’s thinking and could lead to a view of the sublime that is ‘religious par excellence’.<sup>428</sup> Crockett also considers the question of ‘theological disorientation’ by examining Kant’s ideas on the sublime, understood as that which is capable of disrupting orientation.<sup>429</sup> Crockett refers to Kant’s discourse on orientation in thinking and the importance he places on reason as the ‘necessary means of orientation’, in fact the only means of ‘orienting human beings in the world’.<sup>430</sup> The questions relating to ideas of orientation and disorientation in philosophical thinking could lead to misunderstandings when considering Otto’s description of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum*, as there is, in fact, a difference. While Kant, as I have explained, understood the triumph of reason to be the means by which humankind is oriented in the world, Otto, on the other hand, finds that numinous experience confounds human reason and leads to a disorientation and perplexity. However, this is something to be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. For the present, I will return to Kant’s thought on the sublime in terms of the dynamically sublime and humankind’s response.

Kant had spoken of the impact of sublime experience but maintained that even though engulfed in such power there is resistance within humankind that gives us boldness to ‘judge nature without fear and to think of our vocation as being sublimely above nature’.<sup>431</sup> This is Kant’s dynamically sublime in nature, which he explains as capable of becoming a ‘source of fear’. From the point of view of the subject, who is exposed to the fear, there is a method of escape. One way that nature, in its dreadful power, can fail to terrify occurs if the subject is at a safe distance from the source of fear; once this distance and sense of security is achieved, courage is revived and formidable nature is confronted.<sup>432</sup> It is a victory for reflective judgement, brought into play and assisted by reason. Richard White sees this as Kant’s ‘triumphant reassertion of the self which follows the feelings experienced by the impact of the overwhelming object of the sublime’.<sup>433</sup> Here the physical self is likely to come under threat, but as White points out, ‘this only allows us to

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<sup>428</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 19.

<sup>429</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 19.

<sup>430</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, p. 17.

<sup>431</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 123.

<sup>432</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 120.

<sup>433</sup> Richard White, ‘The Sublime and the Other’, *Heythrop Journal*, 38 (1997), pp. 125-43, p.127.

recognise how absolutely important we are as moral agents and ends-in-ourselves'.<sup>434</sup> White is making the point that the human mind makes a courageous effort to face and analyse sublime phenomena; it is the self dominating other forces. This confirms what I have said earlier in this chapter when considering Kant's analysis of the imagination, understanding, and reason. While such an analysis is acceptable in terms of the sublime, it could be claimed that it is quite the antithesis of the effects of the impact of the numinous on the human mind. The pleasure associated with the sublime is known but any pleasure in terms of the numinous has yet to be proven. There is simply an on-going mystery and a desire to search for an answer. While I agree with White on the one hand, on the other I see a positive element associated with the numinous since it asks questions associated with religion that demand answers. One point that can be raised is that an encounter with the sublime can be the result of choice. For example, when faced with sublime phenomena, reason quickly comes to the rescue. In terms of the numinous, especially because it is associated with religion, it is more likely to render the subject mesmerised, perplexed, and terrified, perhaps not immediately but certainly on reflection. In other words, the numinous is likely to have a far more devastating effect on the human mind than the sublime. The numinous challenges Kant's argument for reason, or at least defers the harmony between imagination and understanding brought about by the good sense of reason, to a later date in an analysis of the encounter by the human mind. For the present, however, it is important to accept and acknowledge that for Kant the sublime is seized and taken under control, resulting in its becoming subordinate to human reason. This is rational thinking, whereas in the case of Otto's analysis of the numinous no such assertion can be made, a claim that I will expand upon in Chapter Five.

### **Holiness, morality, and intuition of the numinous**

Melissa Raphael points out that Otto's thinking on the 'relation of holiness to morality' finds its roots in 'his rejection of Kantian moral philosophy'.<sup>435</sup> She finds support for this in Diamond, who shows that a century after Kant, the non-rational was very much

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<sup>434</sup> Richard White, 'The Sublime and the Other', pp. 125-43, p. 127.

<sup>435</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 118.

secondary to the rational and religion came to be considered as an interpretation of moral philosophy.<sup>436</sup> Raphael raises an important point from Kant in respect of holiness, which she states he attributed to the divine as its source. There is a link made between holiness and the moral law and she highlights Kant's claim that it is in the agreement of God's will with the moral law that holiness is possible. She finds a complete contrast between Otto's thinking in *Das Heilige* and that of Kant. For Otto there is no requirement to aspire to the moral law in order to be aware of the divine presence but it is concerned with the involvement of the emotions in the religious life, whereas for Kant, any knowledge of God comes through the human perception of good and evil.<sup>437</sup> This is an important distinction in terms of Kant's and Otto's thinking. Kant's insistence on the moral law and the place of reason seems initially to be far removed from Otto's ideas of a non-rational God. How then can one begin to reconcile two seemingly polarised positions, presuming reconciliation is possible at all?

In *Das Heilige*, Otto claims for Luther and Böhme some intuition of the numinous. In a footnote he refers to Johann Pordage, one of Böhme's disciples, who along with his mentor could find no other words to give expression to the experience of the divine but 'acerbity and bitterness, wrath, fire [...] and the like'.<sup>438</sup> Here may be detected a God who is not going to be domesticated or coerced, who exercises a free and independent will, unapproachable and exempt from human demands for moral goodness or righteousness. However, by stepping back, Otto finds a 'ferocity' and 'fiery wrath' in this 'awefulness'. Yet he ameliorates this with his own interpretation and claims that such words spring from the 'unknown' and may even be simply about 'wrath' as an expression of character but 'without reference to any object'. Otto goes on to locate the non-rational element of 'awefulness' within the *mysterium tremendum*, where 'wrath', 'fire', and 'fury' are appropriate symbols.<sup>439</sup> This struggle to comprehend the absolute meets, in Otto's thinking, with a continuing and exacting challenge. He states that although an attempt can be made to think about the mysteriousness of the divine and may be possible 'within the

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<sup>436</sup> Diamond, *Contemporary Philosophy and Religious Thought*, p. 77.

<sup>437</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 119.

<sup>438</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p.107, n.1.

<sup>439</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 107.

reach of our conceiving’, it remains ‘beyond the grasp of our comprehension’.<sup>440</sup> He finds that our inability to comprehend the absolute lies not in its ‘qualitative character’ but in its ‘formal character’.<sup>441</sup> This inherent mysteriousness of the divine eludes human understanding, remaining ‘in form, quality and thought the “wholly other”’.<sup>442</sup> These Ottonian precepts seem to be in complete contrast to and even a rejection of Kant’s idea of the holiness, which is in congruence with the will and moral law. As Raphael shows, for Kant it is immortality of the soul that can eventually lead to the achievement of holiness for humanity, since the possibility of acquiring goodness is beyond the scope of rational beings.<sup>443</sup> However, if it could be proven, arriving at a state of immortality of the soul could be understood as an outcome of adherence to the moral law, but that is beyond the reach of humankind.

### **Human rationality and the moral law**

What, though, can be a fuller understanding of the ‘moral law’ as Kant sees it, and did this concept have any influence on Otto? For Kant, the moral law is rooted in his categorical imperative, which is a fundamental principle of morality and the law of an autonomous will. The argument is that one should behave in such a way towards others that such action would be a maxim for all people at all times. Merritt sums this up as ‘the good to be brought about through action’.<sup>444</sup> However, the moral law finds its source in human rationality and may be understood, initially, by giving some consideration to Kant’s ‘moral ideas’. He contends that moral ideas are a necessary precursor to a more lasting enjoyment and delight, when participating in the pleasure and entertainment found in, for example, fine arts. His moral ideas are intended to help the subject move beyond simple ‘enjoyment’ of music, song, poetry, and dance. Since the pleasure is rooted in culture, the spirit is encouraged to invite its own ideas and therefore the subject is able to delight in the joy of the presentation. In respect of moral ideas, he makes a reference to the sublime saying that

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<sup>440</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 141.

<sup>441</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p.141.

<sup>442</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 141.

<sup>443</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 118.

<sup>444</sup> Merritt, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 42.

in its presentation and relation to art it is capable of being unified with beauty. He warns against the neglect of moral ideas, since without their influence the fine arts become simply a diversion and fail to satisfy the mind.<sup>445</sup> Kant sees the moral law as pure and capable of bringing delight to the intellect. This particular conceptual law has authority and is able to exercise power over the mind since it accrues from whatever motives have been established earlier. Kant calls this a ‘supersensible faculty’, which moves beyond the beautiful and may be called sublime.<sup>446</sup> Merritt refers to this aspect of Kant’s thinking and states, ‘although we find ourselves in the sensible world, we must also think of ourselves as belonging somehow to a supersensible, or merely intelligible, order of reason’.<sup>447</sup> So the power of reason underscores the moral law.

Further expounding upon his theory of the moral law, Kant suggests that since there is that which ‘ought necessarily to happen’ in his view, and ‘fails to happen on occasion’, then the moral laws should be represented ‘as commands (and the actions conformable to them as duties)’.<sup>448</sup> So duty and obligation become binding on the human agent. Kant’s ideas in terms of a moral law, of which I have presented a few, beg many questions. There is an impression, especially in his reference to ‘commands’, that his thinking may be based, to some extent, on the Hebrew Old Testament teaching where God, through Moses, delivered the Ten Commandments to the Israelites.<sup>449</sup> Kant’s use of the word ‘command’ has a religious connotation and infers something of the divine. His categorical imperative bears some relation to the Christian idea of a Golden Rule, the source of which is to be found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.<sup>450</sup> Conversely, the categorical imperative, which leads to the moral law, is not intended to necessarily benefit anyone but must be embraced for a purer motive, that is, for its own sake. It is not, therefore, intended to lead to what the golden rule may suggest, which is love of one’s neighbour. Kant sees the moral good as capable of being ‘represented as sublime’, which inspires respect rather than love.<sup>451</sup> Driven by duty, the obligations of the moral law can be understood as divine

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<sup>445</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 154.

<sup>446</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, pp. 131-32.

<sup>447</sup> Merritt, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 42.

<sup>448</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 286.

<sup>449</sup> Exodus, 20. 1-17.

<sup>450</sup> Matthew 7.12; Luke 6.31.

<sup>451</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 132.

commands. It is this recognising of duty, guided and governed by reason, which ultimately leads to the idea of God.<sup>452</sup>

Otto, in chapter two of *Das Heilige*, makes reference to Kant's thinking on the 'will' and the 'moral law'. He describes the word 'holy' as having come to mean 'completely good', a point I raised in Chapter Two. For Otto, Kant has helped to consolidate such thinking, since he refers to the will that complies with the moral law as a 'holy' will, strongly objects to Kant's usage of the word in that context, and seeks to eliminate the ethical element from the historical meaning of the word.

## **Conclusion**

With the help of Merritt's diagram on Modes of the Sublime, I have been able to examine further Kant's Taxonomy of Terms relating to varying aspects of the sublime. This gives some form to Kant's thinking and highlights its most important features. One example is the raised consciousness of the subject towards a rational principle, which can be the moral law. Kant's terms work through the moral, the mathematically, and the dynamically sublime. The mathematically sublime I showed to be concerned with scale or magnitude and the dynamically sublime as that which overwhelms the subject, bringing about a sense of power and the force of nature. It is in the realisation of such potent phenomena that the shortcomings of the imagination are disclosed. This leads to an 'outrage' of the imagination, which is only delivered from its affront by the action of the rational mind. I showed the importance of the category of reason for Kant's system of belief and how the imagination, when overwhelmed by the sublime, needs the help of reason in order that the understanding may be satisfied and harmony returns.

As Otto works through his argument, seeking a place for the non-rational in religious thinking, he finds some support for his position in Kant's thought. It must be borne in mind, however, that while Otto was of a seemingly overt religious frame of mind that made space for the irrational, Kant approaches the subject from the point of view of adherence first and foremost to what he calls the moral law. Kant's theory relies, to an

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<sup>452</sup> Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 376.

enormous extent, on the concept of reason. There is still a large question hanging over Otto's position in relation to reason, which will be addressed in Chapter Five.

Otto, however, does claim that in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, some 'distant witness' can be discerned between the numinous and the sublime.<sup>453</sup> Again, in *The Critique of Pure Reason* he found occasion to appreciate Kant's stance, which asserted that knowledge is rooted in experience.<sup>454</sup> This was very much in keeping with Otto's own thinking, even though he championed the idea of the non-rational. At the same time, though, he recognised that the concept was not in accordance with logic or rationality.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 63.

<sup>454</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 113.

<sup>455</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 4.

## Chapter Four

### Friedrich Schleiermacher and His Impact on Otto

I considered in Chapter Three the extent to which Kant's thinking had an influence on Otto. On examination of Kant's 'Modes of the Sublime', as presented by Merritt, I discussed the sublime in its moral, natural, mathematical, and dynamical forces. For the purpose of my work on Otto's concept of the numinous, it was found that the moral and dynamical aspects of Kant's conception of the sublime are the most beneficial in assisting an understanding of the numinous. An important part of the last chapter was my examination of Kant's views on the cognitive function of reason, imagination, and understanding, which was useful in trying to make sense of Otto's thinking on the numinous and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Having evaluated Kant's ideas on religion, I discovered that although he is generally understood to be a philosopher, a title that suggests a certain distance from any theological involvement, he was in fact interested in and attempted to find a place for religion in his thinking. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he writes of the differences between 'doctrinal belief' and 'moral belief'. While the former is found to have instability, the latter leads him to a belief in the 'existence of a God and of a future world'. He claims:

I am irresistibly constrained to believe in the existence of God and in a future life; and I am sure that nothing can make me waver in this belief, since I should thereby overthrow my moral maxims, the renunciation of which would render me hateful in my own eyes.<sup>456</sup>

These are encouraging words from Kant in terms of a thought-out religious belief, since his struggle was with the concept of reason, which tended to dominate his thinking. In his admission of a belief in God, he reconciles reason and moral belief, which leads him to a confession of faith. Kant's religious belief is closely linked with morality, something that Otto would not see as necessary for an experience of the numinous.<sup>457</sup> Otto does, nevertheless, recognise Kant's 'critical examination of reason' and makes a connection

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<sup>456</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 530.

<sup>457</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 6.

between that approach and the approach necessary in order to arrive, via introspection, at the ‘*a priori* cognitive elements’ of the numinous.<sup>458</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to try to discover how Friedrich Schleiermacher’s thought influenced Otto and whether the sublime emerged with any relevance. I briefly considered Schleiermacher’s thought in Chapter One and now seek to assess further his contribution to religious thinking, especially through his book *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799). The work was undertaken in defence of the Christian faith in light of emerging secularisation and the declining influence of religion. Although there was no active hostility towards religion there was some contempt for it in the society of his time. Such writing was formerly called an *apology*, being an ‘intellectual defence of beliefs about God, Christ, the church and our common destiny’.<sup>459</sup> The *apologetic* method of presenting an argument for the upholding of the Christian faith had been in use by early Christian writers, who defended their faith against the objections of Jews and Pagans. St Justin Martyr (c. 100 – 165) was among those who implemented this style in religious writing. The aim of the apologists was to make an appeal to cultivated outsiders in favour of the precepts of Christianity.<sup>460</sup> Centuries later, Schleiermacher’s entreaties were in the tradition of these early apologists and defenders of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, it is arguable as to whether Schleiermacher intended his work to be in the traditional style of *apology*, which was a straightforward defence of Christianity and the Church, since he used a philosophical approach appealing to experience and human nature as he delivered his zealous addresses.

Schleiermacher was in touch with the intellectual and cultural atmosphere of his times and encouraged a move away from passivity towards a greater involvement of the creative imagination. In his *On Religion*, he refers to ‘the holy mysteries of humanity’ and his own seeking of the ‘unknown’. The desire he expresses to pursue the mysteries of religion he sees as a ‘divine calling’, something that does not arise from any rational judgement but from the inner core of his being, suggesting an ‘*a priori*’ inclination towards

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<sup>458</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 113.

<sup>459</sup> Gerald O’Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2000), p. 15.

<sup>460</sup> O’Collins and Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 15-16.

religion.<sup>461</sup> He considers ‘holiness’ in religion, which may be understood to have a link with Otto’s thought on the concept of the numinous.<sup>462</sup> In order to orient my work within the social and political background of Schleiermacher’s day, I will now present a brief biography of his life and will seek, as the chapter progresses, to discover in more detail the extent to which Otto was influenced by his writings. In order to achieve this I will explain, firstly, the social and political background that informed Schleiermacher’s work and thinking and show how his thought was shaped by the pervading influences of his times. It is helpful to consider the political background during Schleiermacher’s day, since there was a move during the reign of King Friedrich Wilhelm II (1786-97) against freethinkers, of which Schleiermacher was one. The enforcement of religious conformity will be discussed shortly. I will explain how, and by whom, Schleiermacher was challenged and drawn away from his passive stance towards a more creative approach to theological issues.

Born in 1768, Schleiermacher was part of the early German Romantic generation. He was the son of a Lutheran army chaplain, and was born in Breslau and educated by the Moravian Brotherhood in Niesky. His subjects of study included ‘an enlightened humanistic curriculum of languages (Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, and English) and mathematics along with the experiential, biblical, and Jesus-centered piety of the Brethren’.<sup>463</sup> As he grew older, he reflected on his time spent with the Moravian Brotherhood and wrote to George Reimer on 30 April, 1802:

Here it was that for the first time I awoke to the consciousness of man to a higher world [...] here it was that the mystic tendency developed itself, which has been of so much importance to me, and has supported and carried me through all the storms of scepticism. Then it was only germinating; now it has attained its full development.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. by Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 4-5.

<sup>462</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 17

<sup>463</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xiii.

<sup>464</sup> Letter to George Reimer (30 April, 1802), *Br. 1*, pp. 294-5; Rowan, *Life of Schleiermacher*, 1, pp. 283-4. Quoted in *On Religion*, p. xii.

Schleiermacher goes on to state that he saw himself in later life as a ‘Moravian of a higher order’.<sup>465</sup> These words give some indication that Schleiermacher’s developing mind may have shown his indebtedness to pietism, or indeed that he had moved on and was reaching towards a sense of the mystical and transcendent. As Schleiermacher stated, he was interested in the ‘unknown’.<sup>466</sup> This tendency will be picked up later as I explore his attraction in the eyes of Otto and consider how he may have influenced him.

At his seminary in Barby near Magdeburg (1765), Schleiermacher found the theological teaching to be narrow and restricting. This led him to pursue his own reading schedule, which included Kant and Goethe, and opportunities for debate with fellow students further developed his thinking. It was at this time that Schleiermacher seems to have undergone a crisis in his religious faith. The challenge concerned his doubts about the vicarious nature of Christ’s death as atonement for sin and whether that was at all true or necessary, since Jesus had apparently never made any allusion to such a claim. It is puzzling as to why Schleiermacher says this since there are, indeed, biblical references to Jesus’s own understanding of his mission. In the Gospel of St Matthew, for example, Jesus states: ‘the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many’.<sup>467</sup> Schleiermacher explains his own position in the following way: ‘God, who evidently did not create men for perfection, but for the pursuit of it, cannot possibly intend to punish them eternally, because they have not attained it’.<sup>468</sup> He wrote to his father confessing his doubts, but failing to find any satisfactory answers entered a period of disillusionment with his religious faith.<sup>469</sup> A move to the university at Halle (1787) encouraged his theological thinking, and there he came under the influence of the rationalists Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716) and Christian Wolff (1679-1758).<sup>470</sup> Schleiermacher continued to pursue theology, philosophy, and classical studies, taking his theological examinations in Berlin in 1790. Failing to acquire an appointment in the Church, he went on to take up a post in 1793 at Schlobitten in East Prussia as a tutor in

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<sup>465</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xiii.

<sup>466</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 4.

<sup>467</sup> Matthew 20. 28.

<sup>468</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xii.

<sup>469</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xii.

<sup>470</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xiii.

the Dohna household, an upper-class royalist family.<sup>471</sup> Living among the elite, where a high value was placed on French culture and critical thinking, Schleiermacher was able to develop his own theological and philosophical thought further. An involvement with the literary milieu was to have significance as he was invited to join the literary salons of Berlin. As a result of these associations, he became friends with Friedrich (1772-1827) and August Schlegel (1767-1845), whose short-lived literary journal *The Athenaeum* offered an opportunity for the young Schleiermacher to publish some of his work.

Unpopular restrictions imposed upon freethinkers during the reign of King Friedrich Wilhelm II meant that Schleiermacher had to stop writing. As Crouter shows, the Edict published in 1788 by Johann Christoph Wollner (1732-1800), concerning religion in the Prussian states, aimed at suppressing ‘rampant freedom and combating unbelief, superstition and moral decay’.<sup>472</sup> During these years, Kant’s *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793) was published and challenged the sole right of ‘biblical theologians and traditionalists’ to interpret religion’.<sup>473</sup> With the accession of King Friedrich Wilhelm III (1770-1840), hopes were raised of a new constitution and greater freedom, as the edict was invalidated and Wollner was removed from his post.<sup>474</sup> At the literary salon of Markus Herz, and through his continued collaboration with Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher formed friendships with the cultural elite. I will go on to show, as this chapter progresses, how these friendships shaped Schleiermacher’s theological thinking and output.

Such company, as I have described, could be deemed inappropriate for one who was a clergyman, since most of Schleiermacher’s acquaintances assumed that religion was dated and irrelevant to their interests. On his twenty-ninth birthday, Schleiermacher was challenged by his friends to justify his continued interest in religion, and when presented with a gift was greeted with a chorus of demands to write a book. The result was *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799). In this work, with a title that suggested a rebuke, Schleiermacher found an opportunity to put forth his own religious arguments. As Crouter states, ‘to some extent his own circle constitutes the cultured

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<sup>471</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xiii.

<sup>472</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xv.

<sup>473</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xvi.

<sup>474</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xv.

despisers'.<sup>475</sup> Schleiermacher had produced earlier more juvenile works such as *On the Highest Good* (1789), *On Freedom* (between 1790 and 1792), and *On the Worth of Life* (1792-3), in which he forms an argument against Kant's claim that happiness is a constituent of the highest good. For the purpose of my work, however, and to discover the ways in which Schleiermacher influenced Otto's thought, my focus will mainly be confined to *On Religion*, and I will include some references to his later work, *The Christian Faith*.

Prompted by what he recognises as a lack of interest in religion in the minds of his companions, Schleiermacher presents the rationale for his *On Religion* as follows: 'especially now, the life of cultivated persons is removed from everything that would in the least way resemble religion'.<sup>476</sup> He accepts that his audience would have been ready to have their suspicions aroused by the very fact that it is religion that is being considered: 'in matters of religion you consider everything more suspicious that comes from those who claim to be experts on the subject'.<sup>477</sup> With the predominance in eighteenth-century Prussia of Enlightenment thinking, the literary and cultural world in which he moved was clearly becoming increasingly secular.

Having struggled through his own perplexing theological doubts, Schleiermacher is hesitant on the one hand to challenge the thinking of those for whom religion has no significance, and yet on the other feels compelled to give an account of his faith. Somewhat in the style of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who reveals his own inner turmoil, Schleiermacher is reluctant to speak out and confront those whom he accuses of despising religion. To the unrepentant people of Jerusalem, Jeremiah declares, 'within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in and I cannot'.<sup>478</sup> In the same way Schleiermacher, conscious of the compulsion to proclaim something on behalf of the Christian faith, admits his inability to resist and speaks of an 'inner' and 'irresistible necessity' that divinely rules [him].<sup>479</sup> Schleiermacher begins, more and more, to be someone in the style of the Old Testament prophets who felt a compulsion to speak out. Responding to this compelling pressure upon him, he embarked upon his

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<sup>475</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xvii.

<sup>476</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 3.

<sup>477</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 4.

<sup>478</sup> Jeremiah 20.9.

<sup>479</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 5.

defensive stance with the invitation to his associates to listen to him.<sup>480</sup> The call to *listen* has resonated down through the ages in religious thinking. Examples can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, for instance in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy traditionally believed to be written by Moses, where we find what is known as the <sup>482</sup>*hemas* (<sup>481</sup>שמע). Again in the New Testament, Jesus often uses the word *listen*, for example in the Parable of the Sower in the Gospel of St Mark (Ch. 4, vs. 3-9), where the first word Jesus uses is ἀκούετε (to listen).<sup>483</sup> The need to listen, therefore, is first and foremost in the development of the life of faith. However, persuading his friends to listen to him is something that Schleiermacher has to address, and as I shall show he demonstrates the opposition he finds to religious thinking by comparing it with other disciplines.

Schleiermacher emphasises that in other disciplines the word of an expert is valued, yet in matters of religion those who may be deemed experts are viewed with suspicion. One of the issues Schleiermacher continues to criticise is the apparent lack of any need among his companions to acknowledge a divine being; he puts forward an analysis of human nature and, finding two dynamically opposing impulses within the self, outlines these primal forces: ‘The former desire is oriented towards enjoyment [whereas the] latter drive despises enjoyment and only goes on to ever-increasing and heightened activity; [...] it wants to fill everything with reason and freedom’.<sup>484</sup> The first impulse is passive and accepts impressions from outside, whereas the other works from within, being dedicated and self-denying, yet one or the other can dominate the human psyche.<sup>485</sup> With these views in mind, Schleiermacher analyses his task and religious position, acknowledging that his message is not going to be popular against the prevailing background of religious prejudice and disbelief.

Nevertheless, Schleiermacher asserts that the subject of his labour, which has engaged him since his youth, remains ‘the holy mysteries of humanity’ and ‘the

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<sup>480</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 4.

<sup>481</sup> Trans. as ‘to hear’.

<sup>482</sup> Deuteronomy 6. 4.

<sup>483</sup> Mark 4. 3; trans. as ‘listen/hear’.

<sup>484</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 5.

<sup>485</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 5.

unknown'.<sup>486</sup> It was such mysteries that Otto also sought to highlight and explain. For now, though, I will consider some further perceptions to be found in Schleiermacher's first Speech. Here he confesses himself to be both 'permeated by religion' and desirous of leading his readers to 'the innermost depths from which religion first addresses the mind'.<sup>487</sup> Schleiermacher seems to be saying that religion is somewhere within the human consciousness as an indication of the '*a priori*' nature of religion that I mentioned earlier when referring to Otto.

In his first speech, entitled *Apology*, Schleiermacher addresses his friends with the intention of persuading them of the value of religion. They are educated and cultivated people rather than opponents, and the lives they live are full and he recognises that they entertain many distractions. They embrace secular thought and focus on 'the maxims of the sages and the songs of the poets [along with] art and science to such a degree that such things have taken possession of their minds'.<sup>488</sup> There is, therefore, no space left for what Schleiermacher sees as the 'eternal and holy'.<sup>489</sup> In an extended tirade upon their lifestyles, their accuser directs his speech towards an existence that is 'completely turned in upon themselves' and 'self-isolating', as their faith lies in the abundance of 'earthly things' that can be collected and which dangerously dominates them. Even though Schleiermacher acknowledges the fact that they are not of a religious frame of mind and are caught up in 'empty ideals', they are still, in his view, people who will listen to him.<sup>490</sup> He flatters them by asserting that they are not only capable of realising that which is holy and divine but are also deserving of such revelation. Whether they were or not is a matter for conjecture, but they were nevertheless the people who urged him on and provided the inspiration for his work. It may have been that Schleiermacher felt very much on his own, just as the prophet Jeremiah did, as I mentioned earlier, as he opposes the popular thinking of his time by challenging Enlightenment thinking in what became known as the Age of Reason. The new ideas advocated by philosophers and scientists contributed to a decline in the elevated position enjoyed by the Church and a rejection of its power and privilege. It was reason

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<sup>486</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 4.

<sup>487</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>488</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 3.

<sup>489</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 3.

<sup>490</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 6.

and logic, therefore, upon which rationalist thinkers based their ideas, and fresh political ideologies led to greater independence of thought. In the wake of Descartes (1596-1650), Spinoza (1632-1677) and, to some extent, Kant, who sought to unite reason with experience, Schleiermacher attempted the difficult task of making his case for religion. I will later show, when examining more closely Otto's thought, that his and Schleiermacher's thinking seem at times to defy logic and reason.

In an unfashionable admission for his time, Schleiermacher berated the French for their treatment of religion, stating 'they all but trample on its most holy laws'.<sup>491</sup> He remonstrates with them for their frivolity, arrogance, and neglect of the 'eternal laws', accusing them of being incapable of 'holy awe and true adoration'.<sup>492</sup> These words refer to the distorted mocking and detrimental views towards religion evidenced in, for example, Voltaire's (1694-1778) *Candide* (1759), a significant work of the Enlightenment that challenged received beliefs. To the mind of Schleiermacher, there is an 'all seeing and infinite power' that he deems essential in regulating that which is right and just in the world and for the maintenance of its order. He goes on to affirm the God-directed mission of certain individuals acting as 'ambassadors' of God, who mediate between divinity and humanity, and between 'limited man and infinite humanity'. Such people are endowed with gifts, enabling them to put others in touch with something finer, in this case the divine. Those who engage in such divine mission he calls 'true priests of the most high', who make available to others what they themselves have received. Where this occurs, a 'better humanity' will emerge and for Schleiermacher there will be a unity and reconciliation between the human and the divine.<sup>493</sup> As I explained earlier, Schleiermacher had been influenced by the thought of Kant, Friedrich Schlegel, and German romantic notions of the sublime. As Crouter states, 'Romanticism fed on the unresolved problems of Kantian thought in ways that reveal a surprising degree of continuity between the Enlightenment and Romanticism'.<sup>494</sup> Kantian thought, especially in terms of reason, which Schleiermacher had attempted to challenge prior to his writing *On Religion*, had presented a continuing difficulty for him. Schleiermacher found himself at a crossroad, denying that

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<sup>491</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 9.

<sup>492</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>493</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>494</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xxviii

religion could be ‘a mere insignificant appendage of morals’ and yet closely involved with those whose thinking gave the appearance of freedom and consolation in a world of changing attitudes and belief systems. As Schleiermacher states:

What they say sounds very beautiful; if someone succumbs while acting morally, it is the will of the eternal and what may not come to pass through us will come into being another time. But even this sublime comfort is not necessary for ethical life; no drop of religion can be mixed with ethical life without, as it were phlogisticating<sup>495</sup> it and robbing it of its purity.<sup>496</sup>

The purity of religion, then, held sway over Schleiermacher’s thinking and was defined as a ‘sense and taste for the Infinite’.<sup>497</sup> With such a definition in mind, he took the opportunity to communicate his beliefs, which were worked through within a culture dominated by Enlightenment and Romantic concepts. However, he moved from his early definition of religion towards ideas of ‘absolute dependence’, which I will discuss later in this chapter in an attempt to discover whether such a definition is the same as a sense of the Infinite and whether one is more conducive than the other to establishing a link with Otto. For the present, I will continue to consider Schleiermacher’s approach to those whose attitude to religion caused him to present his work in order to influence them to a religious mode of thought. Otto, in his introduction to John Oman’s translation of *On Religion*, refers to Schleiermacher’s work as a testimonial to the ‘young Romantic School’. He recognises how, in his writing, the ‘tastes of the time and the stylistic influence of the Schlegelian ambiance are illustrated clearly in the rhythmical and measured cadences [...] and elevated pathos’.<sup>498</sup> However, as Schleiermacher’s interests are primarily religious rather than aesthetic, his theory ought rather to be understood as representing his own commitment to religious belief coupled with a desire to encourage others to an interest and respect for such a way of life. Schleiermacher’s accusations towards those who despise religion are based on his observations of their lives which, although they are filled with ‘art and science’, find

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<sup>495</sup> The German *zu phlogistisieren* refers to the eighteenth-century scientific belief (disproved by Antoine Lavoisier [d. 1794]) in a subtle, inflammable substance called *phlogiston*. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, Note 36, p. 45.

<sup>496</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 45

<sup>497</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 39.

<sup>498</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xi.

no room, as Schleiermacher does, for ideas of ‘the eternal and holy being’ that inhabits eternity.<sup>499</sup> The aim of *On Religion* was to encourage and redress current conceptions of religion and purge it of the misrepresentations to which Schleiermacher believed it had been subjected. In the next section of this chapter I will discuss Schleiermacher’s influence on Otto’s thinking.

### **Schleiermacher’s influence on Otto’s thought**

Otto had been introduced to Schleiermacher’s writings in 1899 by the systematic theologian and founder of the Erlangen School of Theology, Franz Reinhold von Frank.<sup>500</sup> Schleiermacher’s thought attracted Otto, affirming to some extent his own thinking inasmuch as they both understood religion as not finally dependent on rational factors but on a non-rational core.<sup>501</sup> Otto attempts to describe what Schleiermacher is searching for:

What Schleiermacher is feeling after is really the faculty or capacity of deeply absorbed *contemplation*, when confronted by the vast, living totality and reality of things as it is in nature and history. Wherever a mind is exposed in a spirit of absorbed submission to impressions of ‘the universe,’ it becomes capable - so he lays down - of experiencing ‘intuitions’ and ‘feelings,’ of something that is, as it were, a sheer overplus in addition to empirical reality.<sup>502</sup>

Otto’s words evoke thoughts of the Kantian theory of the sublime, in particular the dynamically sublime that is absolutely great in power and exceeds the grasp of sensuous understanding. Quoting Schiller, Otto writes, ‘It waketh the power of feelings obscure that in the heart wondrously slumbered’ [*Der Graf von Habsburg*].<sup>503</sup> Here, he is demonstrating how Kant’s expressions at times give no sense of ‘a clear intellectual scheme’, but with the use of phrases such as ‘not-unfolded or ‘unexplicated concepts’ come to denote ‘principles

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<sup>499</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 3.

<sup>500</sup> Philip C. Almond, ‘Rudolf Otto: The Context of His Thought’, in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 36, No. 3 (1983), p. 352.

<sup>501</sup> Almond, ‘Rudolf Otto’, p. 352.

<sup>502</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 146.

<sup>503</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 148.

of judgement based on pure feeling'.<sup>504</sup> Such pure feeling may have been in Otto's mind, as he recognised in Schleiermacher a move beyond the limitations of present reality and a reaching towards a sense of the transcendent.<sup>505</sup> The 'mind' of which Otto speaks is actively involved by submitting to sense impressions and experiences, receiving in return something beyond the reality of the present.<sup>506</sup> Such thinking, on Schleiermacher's part, is far removed from the sudden, shocking, and unexpected advent of numinous experience described by Otto. The ability to recognise the holy Otto refers to as 'divination', which he relates to a human confrontation with something that is not 'natural' inasmuch as it is 'inexplicable by the laws of nature'. He argues that since such an experience has 'occurred' it must of necessity 'have had a cause'. However, he goes on to separate 'genuine divination' from the 'natural law' and focuses on what it *means*, that is with its significance as a 'sign' of the holy.<sup>507</sup>

In further consideration of the faculty of divination, Otto calls the 'intuitions' both limited and inadequate while at the same time he refers to them as 'true as far as they go'.<sup>508</sup> He suggests that although Schleiermacher has an aversion to the word 'divination', he himself understands it as 'cognitions, modes of knowing [...] and the outcome of feeling', which gives a glimpse of 'an Eternal, in and beyond the temporal and penetrating it'.<sup>509</sup> He further speaks of '*surmises*' and '*inklings*' of 'a reality fraught with mystery and momentousness'.<sup>510</sup> Both Otto and Schleiermacher, however, argue that all religious discourse, all theological ideas and principles are, or ought to be, relatable to affections of the religious consciousness.<sup>511</sup> Peter Harrison, in his book *Religion and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (1990), attempts to make a connection between religious and theological ideas and the human tendency towards subjectivity when engaging with religion. He points to the epistemology, or theory of knowledge, of Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648). In seeking to understand human knowledge, its nature, scope,

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<sup>504</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 148.

<sup>505</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 147.

<sup>506</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 146.

<sup>507</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 144-45.

<sup>508</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 146.

<sup>509</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p.147.

<sup>510</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>511</sup> Almond, 'Rudolf Otto', p. 352.

possibilities, and limits, Herbert declares in his work that truth is arrived at by paying attention to the dictates of one's own faculties. As Harrison states:

The significance of Herbert's religious epistemology is hard to over-emphasise. Introspection is elevated above authority and tradition, becoming the new benchmark of truth. Just as Descartes was to rely on the 'clear and distinct ideas' of the subject, so Herbert claimed that truth is determined by 'that *sensus* which I adduce in evidence on every possible occasion'. The criteria are internal. 'At every point', he says, 'I refer the reader to his own faculties'.<sup>512</sup>

Harrison understands Herbert's work as looking towards a subjective analysis of religious understanding and anticipating that what he saw as 'the *a priori* approach' was an approach that Harrison sees as 'characteristic of Schleiermacher and Otto'.<sup>513</sup> Harrison goes on to emphasise Schleiermacher's claim in *On Religion*, saying, 'The sense of the whole must first be found within our own minds and from thence transferred to corporeal nature'.<sup>514</sup> Harrison also refers to a point I made earlier, but one that keeps emerging when introducing Otto, where he invites his reader to 'direct his mind to a moment of deeply felt religious experience'.<sup>515</sup> In other words, Otto is suggesting that somewhere in the human psyche there is more than likely to have been some encounter with that which is outside and apart from mere rationalism.<sup>516</sup>

Although there were points of fundamental agreement between Otto and Schleiermacher, Otto found cause for argument. He disagreed with Schleiermacher's theory that the essence of religion is limited to a feeling of absolute dependence. Schleiermacher's use of the phrase 'a feeling of absolute dependence' in his book *The Christian Faith* has, with rigorous recent scholarship, begun to emerge with a certain ambiguity which, as I shall show, had implications for Otto's understanding of the phrase.<sup>517</sup> I am now going to

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<sup>512</sup> Peter Harrison, *Religion and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 67.

<sup>513</sup> Harrison, *Religion and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, p.67.

<sup>514</sup> Harrison, *Religion and the Religions*, p. 67.

<sup>515</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 8.

<sup>516</sup> Harrison, *Religion and the Religions*, p. 67.

<sup>517</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), p. 17.

consider Georg Behrens's attempt to distinguish between the *definite* and *indefinite* ways of understanding Schleiermacher's statement on the religious state of mind. Behrens's considerations, as I will go on to show, have some relevance in terms of thinking on the sublime and also on Otto's apprehension of the numinous. Behrens speaks of the *definite form*, which the feeling or consciousness of absolute dependence, and the *indefinite form*, a feeling or consciousness of absolute dependence. He contends that the expressions are 'not necessarily interchangeable' since the adjective 'absolute' in both forms influences their meaning. His argument continues by showing that in type one the word 'absolute' modifies the noun 'dependence', whereas in type two it is the noun 'feeling' that is modified. Behrens, in his search for a cause of the confusion, blames 'influential translators', one in particular being Revd. D. M. Baillie (1887-1954), who he accuses of having adhered to type one expression while Schleiermacher's preferred use was for type two. Baillie, he contends, 'followed his own substantive assumptions about what it was that Schleiermacher wanted to say'.<sup>518</sup> The contextual problem, however, was not settled with Behrens's argument but was taken up again by Hueston E. Finlay, who challenges Behrens's view by arguing that his conclusions, if true, are 'damning' for three reasons. Firstly, Finlay raises Behrens's point about Schleiermacher's 'linguistic sleight of hand', which suggests that Schleiermacher intentionally sought to mislead or at best not to clarify his position. Secondly, he points out that the two expressions 'each focus on a different aspect of religious feeling, one on content and the other on relation', which would imply that Schleiermacher is broaching his central idea from 'two importantly different directions'. Thirdly, since the differences between the two expressions are ignored then the translators are to blame for misguiding their readers.<sup>519</sup> Finlay's argument objects to Behrens's inference that Schleiermacher was 'guilty of intellectual dishonesty'.<sup>520</sup> Whichever way one chooses to understand Schleiermacher's phrase, it remains an attempt to explain how a sense of the divine may express itself in human consciousness.

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<sup>518</sup> Georg Behrens, 'Feeling of Absolute Dependence or Absolute Feeling of Dependence? (What Schleiermacher Really Said and Why It Matters)', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (1998), pp. 471-81.

<sup>519</sup> Hueston E. Finlay, "'Feeling of Absolute Dependence or Absolute Feeling of Dependence"? A Question Revisited', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2005), pp. 81-94. Accessed 28-12-2015.

<sup>520</sup> Finlay, 'Feeling of Absolute Dependence', p. 84.

Schleiermacher's argument challenged Otto's thinking, causing him to say, contrary to his criticisms, that here in Schleiermacher's phrase was 'the first stirring of the feeling of the numinous'.<sup>521</sup> For Otto, then, Schleiermacher's reference to *the* feeling of absolute dependence suggests an intimation of the divine. A similar argument could be put forward in relation to the sublime. As Otto points out, 'religious feelings are not the same as aesthetic feelings', but there is nevertheless an 'analogy between the consciousness of the sublime and [...] the numinous'.<sup>522</sup>

From the Jewish scriptures, Otto presents another example of what he would call an actively present numinous moment in religious experience. He cites an example of such a moment that occurs in the Old Testament. In the story, the Hebrew patriarch Abraham pleads with God for the men of Sodom, saying, 'Behold now I have taken it upon me to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes'.<sup>523</sup> In these words, Otto finds what he calls 'creature consciousness' or 'creature feeling', an emotion of a creature submerged and overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures, namely the deity.<sup>524</sup> With this example, he continues to make his case for the non-rational element in an understanding of the divine. I shall now consider some of the ways in which Otto's thinking diverts from that of Schleiermacher in certain fundamental areas.

Although Otto initially commends Schleiermacher's reference to the 'feeling of absolute dependence', he goes on to acknowledge that such a claim is open to criticism. Firstly, he objects to Schleiermacher's reference to the feeling of emotion, which he claims is not the 'feeling of dependence' (upon the deity) that Schleiermacher speaks of, since such feelings are analogous with experiences found in many other areas of life. He admits that Schleiermacher himself recognises that there is a difference in these states of mind, since he distinguishes the feeling of 'pious and religious dependence from all other feelings of dependence'.<sup>525</sup> However, he maintains that Schleiermacher has made a mistake in simply distinguishing between 'absolute' and 'relative' dependence, which is a 'difference

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<sup>521</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 108.

<sup>522</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 41.

<sup>523</sup> Genesis 18. 27.

<sup>524</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 10.

<sup>525</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p.9.

of degree and not of intrinsic quality'.<sup>526</sup> A. D. Smith suggests that Otto's work is best seen as a 'supplement to Schleiermacher's in the sense that Schleiermacher's actual position does not have to be rejected or seriously revised in order for Otto's claims to be compatible with it'.<sup>527</sup> Such a suggestion denotes a certain lack of understanding of Otto's basic claims. While Schleiermacher speaks of 'dependence', he maintains a rationalist stance that is fairly far removed from Otto's intrinsic claim for a 'non-rational' God. It could not be said that Schleiermacher is opposed to the sense of the sublime or the numinous since he pays, according to Otto's conception of the term, very little attention to the sublime. Nevertheless, as I have shown earlier when discussing Schleiermacher's involvement with German Romantic thought, the sublime is implicit in his work. The idea of the numinous, as understood by Otto, was not something Schleiermacher would have known. I shall later, however, discuss Schleiermacher's ideas on the *sensus numinis*.<sup>528</sup> For the present I shall continue to discuss Smith's thoughts on Otto's criticisms of Schleiermacher, in which Smith discerns two different strands.

Firstly, Smith suggests that 'a feeling, dependence, even an absolute one, is the wrong sort of feeling to locate at the heart of religious consciousness'.<sup>529</sup> He goes on to argue that Otto fails to understand correctly what Schleiermacher is trying to say, and attempts to show that Schleiermacher's views are quite in keeping with those of Otto. He claims that 'according to Otto, by a feeling of dependence Schleiermacher means feeling oneself to be conditioned or caused' and refers to Otto's objection that 'such a sense of causality finds no place in original i.e. - numinous - religious consciousness'.<sup>530</sup> Smith understands Otto's argument as wanting to 'replace Schleiermacher's sense of our createdness with a sense of our creaturehood', a sense that he terms 'creature feeling'.<sup>531</sup> Unswerving in his argument, Otto asserts his own position by claiming that 'in the one case you have the fact of being created; in the other the status of the creature'.<sup>532</sup> The created

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<sup>526</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 9.

<sup>527</sup> A. D. Smith, 'Otto's Criticisms of Schleiermacher', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2009), pp. 187-204. Accessed 15.03.2017

<sup>528</sup> Meaning a sense of the numinous originating in the Deity.

<sup>529</sup> A. D. Smith, 'Otto's Criticisms', p. 188.

<sup>530</sup> A. D. Smith, 'Otto's Criticisms', p. 187.

<sup>531</sup> A. D. Smith, 'Otto's Criticisms', p. 189.

<sup>532</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.

one, in the face of the numinous, and according to Otto's argument, finds 'a superiority or supremacy of a power other than myself'.<sup>533</sup> This is an important point in Otto's argument because of his attempt to explain that the feelings of awe, fear, and terror when experiencing the numinous can only arrive when some sense of a greater power is felt.<sup>534</sup> It is notable that Otto leads on from his discussion of an 'annihilation of the self' and 'the transcendent as the sole and entire reality' and aligns these experiences with those to be found in mysticism.<sup>535</sup> Smith objects to such a move, especially in Otto's criticisms of Schleiermacher's 'feeling of absolute dependence' in respect of the deity. For Smith, Otto's argument can still be feasible, and he asserts that in rejecting Schleiermacher's position, Otto is undermining his own position. Continuing his argument, Smith refers to a clear difference between Schleiermacher's and Otto's fundamental thinking. Schleiermacher speaks of 'holy reverence' and 'pious awe' as a response to the deity, whereas Otto understands such feelings as not being merely 'self feelings' but to do with an object 'outside the self'.<sup>536</sup> For Otto then, belief in a power greater than the self is not enough but it is an experience of that power that is characteristic of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.<sup>537</sup> Early in his professional life, Otto had a certain enthusiasm for Schleiermacher's theory, but later, and in the time leading up to the publication of *Das Heilige*, he changed his allegiance to that of Jacob Friedrich Fries who was a contemporary of Schleiermacher.<sup>538</sup> Andrew Dole shows that Otto had at one time an appreciation of both theologians, since he wrote in *Naturalism and Religion* that Schleiermacher was:

less incisive than Fries, but wider in ideas. He includes in this domain of "intuitive feeling" not only the aesthetic experiences of the beautiful and sublime, but takes the much more general and comprehensive view, that the receptive mind may gather

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<sup>533</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.

<sup>534</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 13.

<sup>535</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.

<sup>536</sup> A. D. Smith, 'Otto's Criticisms', pp. 187-204.

<sup>537</sup> Thomas A. Idinopulos and Brian C. Wilson, eds., *What is Religion? Origins, Definitions, and Explanations* (Brill: Boston, Köln, 1998), p. 148.

<sup>538</sup> Andrew Dole, 'Schleiermacher and Otto on Religion', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 40 (2004), pp. 389-413.

from the finite impressions of the infinite and may through its experiences of time gain some conception of the eternal.<sup>539</sup>

From these observations it becomes clear that Otto is laying some groundwork in his thinking for the ideas he developed in *Das Heilige*. He recognises in Schleiermacher's thought those 'inklings' and 'surmisings' that reach towards a sense of the eternal in humanity, and of which I spoke earlier in this chapter. In his later work, *The Philosophy of Religion*, Otto comments on a possible 'affinity' between Fries and Schleiermacher but in developing his thinking concludes that the 'points of contact' between them are not as significant as their disagreements. He goes on to withdraw any claim he made that Schleiermacher was superior to Fries. However, in his introduction to John Oman's translation of *On Religion*, Otto credits Schleiermacher with directing his endeavours towards 'achieving a correct conception of religion and purging it of the perversions and distortions to which it had been subjected up to then'.<sup>540</sup> Nevertheless, in his own day Schleiermacher's work, as Crouter shows, came in for serious criticism especially from the rationalist philosopher of religion, Hegel.

Hegel, in a mocking tone, claimed that if 'religion is defined as the feeling of absolute dependence then a dog would be the best Christian, for it possesses this in the highest degree and lives mainly in this feeling' to which Crouter replies stating that the possibility of 'self-consciousness is only possessed by humans'.<sup>541</sup> In order to bring some clarification to Schleiermacher's idea on the feeling of absolute dependence in relation to the deity, it is worth considering the theologian Paul Tillich's use of the term 'ultimate concern', which is on the same theme. I shall now give some consideration to Tillich's contribution to the discussion.

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<sup>539</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Naturalism and Religion*, trans. by J. Arthur Thomson and Margaret R. Thomson (London: Williams and Northgate, 1907), p. 76.

<sup>540</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. xvii.

<sup>541</sup> Quoted in Crouter, *Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*, p. 91. See also Richard Crouter, 'Journal of the American Academy of Religion', Vol. 48, No. 1 (Mar., 1980), pp. 19-43 (p. 41); where Crouter notes: 'Writing to de Wette (summer 1823) Schleiermacher says; "For his part Hegel continues to grumble about my animal-like ignorance of God, just as he already did in the preface of Hinrich's philosophy of religion and in his lectures, while recommending Marheineke's theology exclusively. I pay no attention to it, but still it is not pleasant" (Nicolin, #391).

For Tillich this ‘ultimate concern’ is something capable of uniting a subjective and objective meaning. His argument is that ‘somebody is concerned about something he considers of concern’.<sup>542</sup> As D. Mackenzie Brown shows, ‘Tillich defines faith, and indirectly religion, as “ultimate concern”. Religion is direction or movement toward the ultimate or the unconditional’.<sup>543</sup> Tillich goes on to claim:

Ultimate concern is the abstract translation of the great commandment; “The Lord, our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength”.<sup>544</sup>

Tillich expounds his theory further stating that it is religious concern that is ultimate, precluding all other concerns, causing them to be merely ‘preliminary’ in the face of a religious concern that is ‘total’ and ‘infinite’.<sup>545</sup> Tillich’s argument continues to be debateable when held in tension with secular beliefs, arguments from reason, and the notion of the sublime. However, any experience of the sublime or the numinous is likely to call forth thoughts of ultimate concern. My argument is about things beyond, especially when the concern is with the sublime and the numinous. However, discernment relating to the sublime and the numinous is usually left to interested theorists. The numinous, in particular, does not receive overt support from the Christian Church since the path of theological understanding moves slowly and is subject to rigorous scrutiny by one theologian after another. Tillich’s work is concerned with the holy and he, like Otto, considers the prophet Isaiah’s words, which could be understood to be a response to the numinous.<sup>546</sup>

Tillich’s ultimate concern, Schleiermacher’s absolute dependence, and Otto’s sense of the numinous and the sublime all hint at transcendence. The feeling of ultimate concern for F. David Martin is associated with anxiety related to humankind’s concerns about mortality and the temporal nature of the values inherent in his secular life. While for Martin, ultimate concern is linked with an awareness of the holy, he still sees it as

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<sup>542</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Volume 3 (London: James Nisbet, 1964), pp. 138-39.

<sup>543</sup> D. Mackenzie Brown, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 1965).

<sup>544</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (London: Nisbet, 1953), p. 14.

<sup>545</sup> Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 14.

<sup>546</sup> Isaiah 6.

‘enmeshed somehow with secular value’.<sup>547</sup> Here some link can be made with the sublime since, as I have established earlier, the experience evokes some of the sensations claimed for an experience of the numinous. However, Otto claimed that the mysterious and transcendent character of the holy far outweighed any rational categories. Martin goes on to sum up what the numinous means in Otto and adds to its character the ‘wholly other’, which he associates with the transcendent. The transcendent he understands as capable of inspiring wonder, stupor, awfulness, fear, and dread, in fact the many attributes Otto ascribes to the *mysterium tremendum* aspect of the numinous.<sup>548</sup> Martin sees an aspect of this numinosity in Grunewald’s depiction of the Crucifixion, where he envisages the holy and what Tillich calls ultimate concern expressed in the form of religious symbols.<sup>549</sup> Martin refers to Grunewald’s painting, which he calls an ‘emotive icon of inexhaustibility’, and relates it to Otto’s point that ‘In the arts nearly everywhere the most effective means of representing the numinous is “the sublime”’.<sup>550</sup> Martin, by quoting Otto, is making a link between the numinous and the sublime, and so we have a suggestion that the two concepts are not entirely unconnected and that a relationship between them is recognisable. On the question of the arts and the sublime, Shaw considers Kant’s representation of sublimity, pointing out that ‘although Kant does refer in the course of his discussion to numerous examples from literature, music and the visual arts he does not appear to devote much attention to how, precisely, sublimity is manifested in these examples’.<sup>551</sup> Otto’s attempt to show that the numinous is expressed in art leads him to claim that the:

feeling for expression must have begun to awaken far back in the remote Megalithic Age. The motive underlying the erection of those gigantic blocks of rock, hewn or unworked, single monoliths or titanic rings of stone, as at Stonehenge, may have well been to store up the numen in solid presence by magic.<sup>552</sup>

Otto pursues his argument by stating that those who built the pyramids and the Great Sphinx of Giza ‘set the feeling of the sublime, and together with and through it that of the

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<sup>547</sup> F. David Martin, ‘The Beautiful as Symbolic of the Holy’, *The Christian Scholar*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (June 1958), pp. 125-33 (p. 128).

<sup>548</sup> Martin, ‘The Beautiful as Symbolic of the Holy’, p. 129.

<sup>549</sup> Martin, ‘The Beautiful as Symbolic of the Holy’, p. 130.

<sup>550</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 65.

<sup>551</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime* (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), p. 111, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

<sup>552</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 65-66.

numinous [...] throbbing in the soul almost like a mechanical reflex, [and] must themselves have been conscious of this effect and intended it'.<sup>553</sup> Here we have Otto describing a relationship between the sublime and the numinous. I will now consider Schleiermacher's discussion on the idea of holiness in religion, which relates to the numinous, and I will go on to explore that aspect of his thinking through the fifth of his speeches in *On Religion*.

Schleiermacher takes up the concept of holiness, in fact he asserts that an infinite holiness is the goal of Christianity. This holiness, however, he sees as giving the appearance of being lost within the profaneness of the non-religious life:

What do you call the feeling of an unsatisfied longing that is directed against a great object and of whose infinity you are conscious? What seizes you when you find the holy most intimately mixed with the profane, the sublime with the lowly and transitory?<sup>554</sup>

Here, Schleiermacher in his reference to the 'lowly and transitory' raises the profile of the sublime to the level of the holy, although how the sublime is fully understood by Schleiermacher is not made clear. For him, the 'irreligious principle is everywhere present and operative and because everything real appears at the same time to be unholy'.<sup>555</sup> Confessing to his own feelings of sadness and pain as a result of attitudes to what he calls 'an all-seeing and infinite power' and acknowledging Christianity's many corruptions, he nevertheless lays the blame on humanity, which he suggests is the source of corruption in this case.<sup>556</sup> Schleiermacher continues to develop the theme of holiness and rather strangely claims that religion 'considers everything holy'.<sup>557</sup> That is not something with which I would agree, although I would not say it is untrue yet rather lacks an extensive explanation that would have to take into account aspects of the secular. As such, it must remain simply a sweeping statement of Schleiermacher's immaturity. However, as he explores his own question 'what is religion?' he explains that he will present to his readers,

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<sup>553</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 66.

<sup>554</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 119.

<sup>555</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 117.

<sup>556</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 15.

<sup>557</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 17.

who are properly prepared, ‘a rare spirit’ that seems to suggest a hidden God.<sup>558</sup> At the end of the fifth speech, Schleiermacher returns to the obscurity of the holy. The sacred, he asserts, ‘remains secret and hidden from the profane’.<sup>559</sup> It was indeed this hidden God that Otto was attempting to explain in his work *Das Heilige*, and although he found cause for disagreement with Schleiermacher’s thinking he seems to have discovered, in Schleiermacher’s discussion of the holy and the profane, a foundation for his own thinking on the numinous and the *mysterium tremendum*. Otto, and he was not alone, saw fit to write about Schleiermacher’s ‘rediscovery of the *sensus numinis*’, and I shall now discuss this concept.

In a section of his book *Religious Essays* entitled ‘How Schleiermacher re-discovered the *sensus numinis*’, Otto presents the difficulties of the prevailing Rationalism faced by Schleiermacher towards the end of the eighteenth century. Schleiermacher, having come from a pietistic background, was steeped in religion. Nevertheless, the friends he gathered around him, to whom I have referred earlier in this chapter, and who included Friedrich and August Schlegel and Friedrich Schelling, (1775-1854), described by Otto as ‘young romantics’, had no interest in religion and yet within them there was a desire, according to Otto, for ‘a fuller vision of life’.<sup>560</sup> The difficulties faced by Schleiermacher included the relegation of religion to a state of theological or philosophical theorising by the well educated. The activity was indeed focused on the wider issues of life and asked questions about God, the soul, and humanity’s place in the world, but it had, according to Otto, become chiefly to do with morals and utilitarianism. Attitudes to religion that involved accusations of enthusiasm and fanaticism did not help the situation, and eventually, as Otto claims, the sense of the numinous died out. However, he finds in Schleiermacher’s writings the vitally important re-discovery of the numinous in the concept of the *sensus numinis*.

The difference, according to Otto, was not to do with poetry or aesthetics but lay in human experience, and Schleiermacher was the person who would re-invent, to some

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<sup>558</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>559</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 124.

<sup>560</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Religious Essays: A Supplement to The Idea of the Holy*, trans. by Brian Lunn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 72.

extent, a sense of the spiritual that lay not in an over-pietistic attitude to temporal and eternal things but grew out of a sincere longing to bring about a change in the way in which religion was understood.<sup>561</sup> In an effort to explain piety and experience in religion, as opposed to mere theorising or philosophising about it, Otto provides a helpful analogy relating to a Gothic cathedral. There are, he explains, many ways in which the cathedral can be experienced depending on the inclination of the viewer. These can involve a ‘theoretical’ relationship, a ‘practical’ relationship, or a relationship in which the visitor can experience what the building has to offer by silently contemplating the place and its meaning. The theoretical relationship may relate to observing the dimensions of the building, the ways in which it was constructed, and its style. The one who enters into a practical relationship will tend to focus on any faults the building may have and cogitate upon any problems or restoration needed. For the one who approaches the building from an experiential position, there is something entirely different available, whatever the state of the building, and this is the spiritual experience that is reached by quiet contemplation. Otto goes on to glorify the third approach, suggesting that the way of contemplation reveals the ‘mystery’ and ‘sublimity’ to be found in the building’s ‘symbolism’.<sup>562</sup> Such an approach Otto equates with that of Schleiermacher, when trying to convince his friends of the difference between the purely rational, the moral, and the religious. The route suggested by Otto and his effort to link it with Schleiermacher’s thinking is therefore a way that would lead to some re-establishing of a religious mindset and a re-discovering of the *sensus numinis*. As I have shown in Chapter Two, architecture and the works of nature affect a sense of the sublime. However, although these human or natural constructions may evoke a sense of awe and even terror, they do not evoke a sense of the numinous, and are subtly different from that to be found in Otto’s theory, as I shall show in Chapter Five. I shall now give further thought to the idea of the *sensus numinis*.

The concept of the *sensus numinis* is discussed by Robert F. Streetman, who describes how it can be understood.<sup>563</sup> He claims, for Schleiermacher, the distinction of

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<sup>561</sup> Otto, *Religious Essays*, pp. 70-73.

<sup>562</sup> Otto, *Religious Essays*, pp. 75-77.

<sup>563</sup> Robert F. Streetman, ‘Romanticism and the *Sensus Numinis* in Schleiermacher’, in *The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher and Romanticism*, edited by David Jasper (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 104.

having breathed ‘new life into religion’ by his re-discovery of the *sensus numinis* and ‘reintroducing religion to the thinking people of his age’.<sup>564</sup> Streetman states that for an experience to be categorised as religious it must contain some quality of the numinous. This numinous quality is the ‘religious element’ in any experience of religion and is ‘prior to’ and ‘apart from’ any rational and moral overtones it may accrue as it develops itself in experience and history’.<sup>565</sup> It is through the presence of the *sensus numinis* that a way to the numinous is found and religious experience is captured. Streetman suggests that Schleiermacher’s rediscovery of this phenomenon made a difference to theological discourse and was a source of encouragement to secular thinkers, who began to see new possibilities in religious thinking and human feeling. Streetman goes further and proposes that Schleiermacher’s writings ‘may still serve as a catalyst toward our own rediscovery of the *sensus numinis* in a form that speaks most directly to us’.<sup>566</sup> He recognises that for Schleiermacher, there was a tension springing from his innate faith experience, which found its source in the *sensus numinis*, and the pressures of rationalism fed by Enlightenment thinking.<sup>567</sup> It was this dichotomy that Schleiermacher had to think through. The concept of the *sensus numinis*, however, was not the sole prerogative of Otto, as Philip Almond shows.

Almond argues that Otto gave little credit to Count Nicholas Von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) who led the Moravian pietists in Herrnhut, Saxony. However, Almond claims that Zinzendorf influenced Otto, prompting him to produce a paper entitled ‘Zinzendorf uber den “Sensus Numinis”’. Zinzendorf speaks of ‘Scheu’ (dread) and ‘Entsetzen’ (horror) as being determinates of religious feeling. Such experiences are, as Almond points out, connected with the *tremendum* to which Otto refers when describing numinous experience. Zinzendorf also speaks of the *sensus numinis*, stating that it lies deep within humankind. He explains it in the following way: ‘in all creatures there is a *Sensus Numinis* which indeed often lies very deep, but which the smallest contact from outside makes sensible to the subject himself and palpable to him who experiences it’.<sup>568</sup> Despite failing to

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<sup>564</sup> Jasper, *The Interpretation of Belief*, p. 104.

<sup>565</sup> Jasper, *The Interpretation of Belief*, p. 105.

<sup>566</sup> Jasper, *The Interpretation of Belief*, p. 123.

<sup>567</sup> Jasper, *The Interpretation of Belief*, p. 107.

<sup>568</sup> Almond, ‘Rudolf Otto’, pp. 350-51.

acknowledge Zinzendorf's contribution to his thinking on the *sensus numinis*, Otto nevertheless shows that Zinzendorf was, in fact, a forerunner to his own and Schleiermacher's views.

## Conclusion

In the development of this chapter I have considered both the areas of agreement and disagreement in the thinking of Schleiermacher and Otto, especially where there has been some influence on Otto's thinking. I have considered relevant background material in Schleiermacher's life and times. It becomes clear that Schleiermacher, living during an era not only of religious and political upheaval but also during the era of the Enlightenment, sought to find a way in which he could interest his friends and ultimately a wider audience in his faith, as part of his desire to make Christianity favourable and relevant to their lives. Schleiermacher does not overtly discuss the sublime, but it is implicit in his work and his association with that of Schlegel, who had an interest in sublimity that may have made a difference to Schleiermacher's thinking, as Otto explains in his discussion on Schleiermacher's sense of intuitive feeling.<sup>569</sup> Schleiermacher seems to have paved the way, to some extent, for Otto's thinking inasmuch as he attempts to re-present a theory of a divine being to people for whom that had very little meaning. He also showed that human feelings were important, and that in itself was pertinent to Otto's work since he sought to show the relevance of the numinous and the *mysterium tremendum* in human experience.

Of further note is the way in which Schleiermacher and Otto at times complement one another in their thinking. While Schleiermacher attempts to describe the relationship of the creature to the divine, Otto discovers some movement from the divine to the creature, and both these aspects of human response have relevance for my work. There is, nevertheless, a huge gap between Schleiermacher's and Otto's conceptions of the divine in human consciousness. Schleiermacher's thinking stays safely with the rational in terms of his ideas of absolute dependence upon a totally dependable God, whereas Otto's thinking is far more dynamic, making a case for an unpredictable, hidden, awe-inspiring, and esoteric deity.

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<sup>569</sup> Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, p. 146.

## Chapter Five

### Permeating the Mundane: From the Transcendent to the Immanent

The focus of my research in Chapter Four considered the influences of other theologians on Otto's thinking, with an emphasis on Friedrich Schleiermacher's thought. I described how Otto, responding to Schleiermacher's ideas on 'the feeling of absolute dependence' in terms of a relationship with the deity, found some causes for agreement and others for disagreement. Part of my examination of Otto's and Schleiermacher's thoughts focused on the sublime and how they viewed the concept. I showed that Schleiermacher was influenced by Kant and Schlegel's accounts of the sublime and by German Romantic thought. Otto also came under Kant's influence, acknowledging that ideas of the sublime awakened powerful feelings. I gave examples of these and examined the findings of Georg Behrens on Schleiermacher's claims regarding 'absolute dependence' on the deity. The challenge to Behrens's thinking made by Heuston E. Finlay was discussed in the light of human consciousness of the divine, as was the sublime. Otto argued for a greater respect for human experience and feelings in religion and I demonstrated this with examples. An area of agreement between Otto and Schleiermacher emerged with Otto's appreciation of Schleiermacher's re-discovery of the *sensus numinis*.<sup>570</sup> One imagines that it was a challenging task for Otto to find some evidence for a sense of the holy or an encounter with the deity in particular parts of Schleiermacher's writings. Schleiermacher, although coming originally from a pietistic background, brought a subtly different perspective in his philosophy of religion to that of Otto. Schleiermacher's thinking grew out of a response to the era of the Enlightenment, which was dominated by the rationalism of Kant, Spinoza, and others, but he was no rationalist himself. Otto, while giving some credence to rationalism, was much more inclined towards the non-rational from which his most important ideas evolved and to which he remained faithful in the midst of criticism.

In this chapter I will further examine Otto's idea of the numinous and attempt a deeper study of his argument for the phenomenon of the *mysterium tremendum et*

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<sup>570</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Religious Essays*, trans. by Brian Lunn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 68-77. *Sensus numinis* translates from Latin to English as 'sense of the deity'.

*fascinans*. I will seek to discover how Otto understands that which is *beyond*, yet which is capable of entering into human experience. The distinction between the merely natural and the wholly other can be understood as lying partly in the imagination and in that which lies beyond the mere natural. As Emily Brady shows, ‘The mixed feeling of the sublime involves both attraction and repulsion’, which is a claim that is used by Otto for the numinous. For this reason and in this context, Brady’s work is significant. My work, therefore, will challenge Brady’s account of a sublime that is something like the numinous.<sup>571</sup> Further, particular attention will be paid to the concept of the sublime, and some of the works examined in previous chapters will be revisited. In light of my recent research on Longinus, Burke, and eighteenth-century theorists of the sublime, I will seek to clarify some aspects of Otto’s argument. I also aim to discover, in more detail, where some of the discourses of eighteenth-century theorists demonstrate similar concerns to that of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. There are commonalities of *experience* to be found in both concepts, and therefore I expect to move closer to discovering whether the secular discourse of the sublime has any significant relevance for religious thought. In order to clarify what is meant by the wholly other, a term used by Otto and discernible in religious writings, I offer the following explanation.

### **Otto, the wholly other, and the sublime**

Otto tells us that the term wholly other first emerges in the writings of the Hindu Upanishads from 2,500 years ago, known as *Anyadeva* in Sanskrit.<sup>572</sup> What Otto emphasises is the ‘qualitative *Other* of the supernatural’ compared with the ‘creature’. He is at pains to impress upon his readers that a sense of the wholly other distinguishes religion from ‘anthropomorphism’ and from ‘emotional morals’. However, he does not explain what he means by ‘emotional morals’, and as such I will venture a conjecture and say that human consciousness, when governed by a religious outlook, disciplines its own moral fidelity.<sup>573</sup> The presence of the wholly other aspect of religious experience, for Otto, originates in the most primordial awakenings of religious feeling and aspires to the ‘highest

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<sup>571</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 57.

<sup>572</sup> Otto, *Religious Essays*, p. 78. *Anya deva* translates as ‘other deity’.

<sup>573</sup> Otto, *Religious Essays*, p. 78.

and most abstract forms of theological speculation'.<sup>574</sup> A sense of 'Otherness' emerges in the thinking of Emily Brady, who speaks of it in relation to the sublime and refers to its 'overwhelming quality'.<sup>575</sup> Brady offers a solution concerning where to place the human aesthetic response to the sublime and suggests the idea of 'mystery' and the 'numinous' or 'openness to mystery that we find in Otto's work'.<sup>576</sup> Brady goes on to question the place of 'mystery' when considering the sublime, as she states 'imagination and senses are challenged' by the sublime.<sup>577</sup> She claims that there are 'limits' and boundaries set, which make it difficult to 'take in' situations that we might call sublime, and there can be a sense in which the sublime experience presents the 'ungraspable'.<sup>578</sup> Here, Brady is facing the challenge presented by the dual concepts of the sublime and the numinous, which at times give every impression of making the same point or of presenting a similar experience. As with the sublime there can be a sense of bewilderment in the numinous and the *mysterium tremendum*, the latter of which presents itself as singularly outside of and other than that which is rational and even acceptable. So here Brady agrees with the idea that there is a case for some relationship between the sublime and the numinous, as she asserts:

Certainly scientific knowledge can enable us to understand many things greater than ourselves, such as the Milky Way, but nevertheless a feeling of the ungraspable may remain; that feeling is part of the metaphysical aspect of the sublime experience which goes along with being overwhelmed.<sup>579</sup>

Here again, Brady uses the language of the numinous in her reference to being overwhelmed, since the term is a familiar one when dealing with the concept, especially in the work of Otto. However, the wholly other is not a phrase used when contemplating the sublime even though both the wholly other and the sublime cause us to experience the 'limit to our capacities' of which Brady speaks.<sup>580</sup> The sublime, then, hovers around that which may be conceived as the wholly other. At the same time, the sublime is not the wholly other since this phenomenon has the distinction of being referred to as something

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<sup>574</sup> Otto, *Religious Essays*, p. 78.

<sup>575</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 196.

<sup>576</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 196.

<sup>577</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 197.

<sup>578</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 197.

<sup>579</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 197.

<sup>580</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 197.

completely different to that which comes about by an experience of the sublime, as I shall later show. However, when we speak of the *Other* as opposed to the wholly other, we are dealing again with something different as I shall now explain.

While the concept of the *Other* can find its basis in how one relates to another human being, that of the wholly other is usually reserved for the abstract idea of deity. With this in mind, Otto's thought in *Das Heilige* seeks to understand higher expressions of theology, for example, when he speaks of 'the manifestations of the holy and the faculty of divination'.<sup>581</sup> Nevertheless, he still claims that an experience of the (*Wholly*) *Other* has been intrinsic to humankind's early spiritual strivings and encounters with that which is beyond the mere natural.<sup>582</sup> For Otto, the 'processes of [...] religion' have evolved 'not from the homely and the familiar but from the uncanny, rising to the Wholly Other, which is remote from everything human'.<sup>583</sup> The remoteness of the deity and the rare insight into that remoteness, which is sometimes experienced by humankind, is part of what Otto is arguing about. There is a mysteriousness associated with *mysterium*, as the word suggests, which can be understood on a basic level as being associated with secrecy, or a mystery that is difficult to explain. However, as a constituent of the wholly other, the *mysterium* becomes quite incomprehensible and gives the impression of being beyond human understanding, and this is the challenge that faced Otto as he sought to establish some respect for the non-rational in religion.<sup>584</sup> Nevertheless, while the phenomenon may be thought of as beyond human understanding, it also attracts and fascinates in such a way as to encourage a belief in the possibility of comprehension and discernment.

### ***The mysterium tremendum et fascinans, the hiddenness of the divine, and holy fear***

So, what is the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* in the context of Otto's thought? Otto describes it as suggesting something that is 'hidden' and 'esoteric', and it cannot be conceived or understood since it is 'extraordinary' and 'unfamiliar'.<sup>585</sup> With such a

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<sup>581</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 143.

<sup>582</sup> Otto, *Religious Essays*, p. 78.

<sup>583</sup> Otto, *Religious Essays*, p. 78.

<sup>584</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 26.

<sup>585</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 13.

description, one may be tempted to surrender to the implication, in Otto's narrative, that this remarkable conjecture is just too demanding to contemplate with a finite mind, which lacks what he calls any 'deeply felt religious experience'.<sup>586</sup> Yet within the phenomenon he proposes, there are certain human and natural elements that may be more easily understood. For example, there is the element of *awefulness*, in respect of the *mysterium tremendum*. An everyday and fundamental understanding of the word 'awful' is to do with that which may be abhorrent to us, but intrinsic to the element of *awefulness*, of which Otto speaks, is the emotion of *fear*. Fear, in this context, is described first by Otto as '*tremor*', which he refers to as the normal emotion of fear that is familiar to humankind. On the other hand, he states that the *awefulness* associated with the *mysterium tremendum* is quite different, and he offers an example of the type of fear to which he refers. Such fear, in Otto's thinking, is more in keeping with an understanding of the word 'hallow', which involves a sensation of dread. Conceived in this way by Otto, the element of *awefulness* becomes associated with the numinous and therefore is to do with the numen, or deity. In order to clarify this point, I now go on to consider how a type of religious fear is perceived in the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures.

The word *phobos* (φόβος), meaning 'fear' in the Christian gospels originally had the meaning of 'flight', which was associated with being scared, although it later came to mean 'that which may cause flight', namely fear, dread, and terror. For example, in the gospel of Luke there is a reference to terrors and 'dreadful portents'.<sup>587</sup> With these views in mind, it is challenging to conceive of humankind in a relationship of closeness or familiarity with the deity. For Otto there is a prodigious difference between the Creator and the creature. He describes this stirring of 'religious dread' as 'something uncanny', 'eerie', or 'weird', and which showed itself in the mind of early humans and led to the beginnings of 'religious development'.<sup>588</sup> This fear in early humankind reveals itself, for Otto, in 'daemonic dread'. He cites as an example the 'horror' and 'shudder' felt when ghost stories are related. What he is attempting to do is distinguish between this natural

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<sup>586</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 8.

<sup>587</sup> Luke 21.11.

<sup>588</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 15.

fear and the fear associated with the *awefulness* that he is presenting.<sup>589</sup> The Greek New Testament indicates some move towards a different understanding of fear. The word *eulabeia* (εὐλάβεια), meaning ‘reverence’, signifies ‘caution’ and then ‘reverence and godly fear’, and it can also be understood as ‘apprehension’ but more especially ‘holy fear’.<sup>590</sup> The Hebrew *yārē* (אָרַע), meaning ‘to be afraid’ or ‘stand in awe’ and which indicates the ‘psychological reaction to fear’, is associated with fear of someone or something.<sup>591</sup> An example of this type of fear is found in the book of Genesis, where Jacob fears the approach of his brother Esau and prays, ‘Deliver me; I pray thee, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him’.<sup>592</sup> Just as in the Greek, so also in the Hebrew is there an understanding of the word *fear* as relating to a sense of reverence, for the divine especially but also towards people who are in an exalted position and so inspire a sense of awe, engendering respect:

This is not simple fear, but reverence, whereby an individual recognizes the power and position of the individual revered and renders him proper respect. In this sense the word may imply submission to a proper ethical relationship to God; the angel of the Lord told Abraham: “[...] I know that thou fearest God”.<sup>593</sup>

This aspect of fear was also partly discussed in Chapter One, when speaking of Jacob at Bethel, who uttered the words: ‘How awesome is this place’.<sup>594</sup>

Such an experience of fear could lead to a trembling, such as that described by the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). In *The Gift of Death*, Derrida speaks of ‘trembling’ in respect of the *mysterium tremendum* and asks what it is that makes us tremble. Derrida speaks of ‘a certain irrepressible agitation of the body, the uncontrollable instability of its members’.<sup>595</sup> He links his observation to other symptoms of distress, for example ‘tears’. Derrida acknowledges that further study would need to be undertaken in

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<sup>589</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 16.

<sup>590</sup> *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, pp. 229-30.

<sup>591</sup> Cf. Lev. 19.14: ‘And thou shalt stand in awe of thy God’. F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), p. 431.

<sup>592</sup> Genesis 32.11.

<sup>593</sup> *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary*, p. 79. The word ‘whereby’ and the spelling of ‘recognizes’ are given according to the original source.

<sup>594</sup> Genesis, 28.17. King James Version.

<sup>595</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret*, p.56.

order to discover more about ‘the thinking of the body’ so that we may better understand what makes us tremble. He concludes that what makes us tremble in the *mysterium tremendum* is something to do with ‘the gift of infinite love’.<sup>596</sup> He explains ‘the gift of infinite love’ as ‘the dissymmetry that exists between the divine regard’ that sees him and himself who does not see who is looking at him.<sup>597</sup> Derrida senses the ‘disproportion’ that exists between the divine and his own mortal self. The ‘disproportion’ carries with it a duty and responsibility for the ‘other’, as Derrida states *tout autrest toutautre* [‘Every other (one) is every (bit) other’].<sup>598</sup> Derrida also uses the phrase ‘every other is a wholly other’ and the reference to the wholly other is familiar from Otto’s thought, to which I refer later in this chapter. The author Jeffrey Hanson shows that when Derrida uses the phrase he is emphasising ‘the inaccessibility of the other, the other’s resistance to totality, the retreat of the face of the other’.<sup>599</sup> Derrida goes further, claiming that he has a responsibility to all ‘others’ who become ‘completely or wholly other’:

As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is by sacrificing whatever obliges me to also respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others.<sup>600</sup>

A reference to the idea of the ‘gaze’ of the divine is found in the story of Hagar in the Book of Genesis. Hagar, who ran into the wilderness to escape the harsh treatment meted out to her by her mistress meets the ‘angel of the Lord’. Hagar is told to return to her mistress and submit to her. Amazed by the theophany, Hagar gives a name to the place, ‘El-roi’ meaning ‘God who sees’ in Hebrew.<sup>601</sup> Derrida refers the reader to the writings of St. Paul and his recommendation to the Christians at Philippi that they work out their own salvation ‘with fear and trembling’.<sup>602</sup> Such a reference suggests that ‘fear and trembling’ are

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<sup>596</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p. 56.

<sup>597</sup> Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 56.

<sup>598</sup> Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 69.

<sup>599</sup> Jeffrey Hanson, ‘Returning (to) the gift of death: Violence and history in Derrida and Levinas’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (February 2010), pp. 1-15 (p. 13).

<sup>600</sup> Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 69.

<sup>601</sup> Genesis 16. 7-13.

<sup>602</sup> Philippians 2. 12.

responses to a relationship with, or even a search for, the divine. Derrida goes on to argue that it is not in the presence of God that salvation is worked out but rather in the absence of God. Here Derrida inclines towards apophatic or negative theology.<sup>603</sup> Apophatic theology seeks, by negation, to describe the Divine in terms of what may not be said rather than what may be said. Through discernment, an attempt is made to bring clarification to religious experience. For Derrida, although salvation is worked out by humankind they are, nevertheless and unknowingly, ‘in the hands’ of God and ‘under the gaze of God’, and ultimately the recipients of what is divinely offered.<sup>604</sup> Derrida was clearly influenced by Kierkegaard’s book *Fear and Trembling*, to which I referred earlier in this chapter when exploring the story of Abraham. Here, as in the story of Hagar, there is a God who sees and in those particular instances acted for the good of those in desperate need. While Derrida speaks of an absent God, he nevertheless speaks also of an all seeing God who has some control over and an interest in humankind. The instances I have highlighted say something of the dual character of the numinous, that is the dichotomy between the fear and trembling and the eventual joy it may deliver.

While Otto calls the *fascinans* aspect of the numinous uniquely attractive and fascinating, as I have already established, he still holds on to the claim he makes concerning the dual character of the numinous. On the one hand there is the terror that the phenomenon evokes, while on the other there is that attractiveness and fascination that is also part of it. Otto contrasts the ‘daemonic dread’ in the face of the numinous with the sense of allurement and attractiveness in its appealing and bewildering presence.<sup>605</sup> These ideas, put forward by Otto, help one to understand why he calls, at the start of his discussion, for readers of his work to have some sense of that which is other than the rational.<sup>606</sup> If the examples I have given indicate that a direct revelation of the deity is not forthcoming and only the sensation of being in such an august presence is felt, then we are left to ponder further the possibility of a hidden God or non-realist theism. Non-realistic theism is concerned with the nature and source of human knowledge pertaining to religion,

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<sup>603</sup> Apophatic theology, from the Greek αποφασις, from αποφημι (‘to deny’).

<sup>604</sup> Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 57.

<sup>605</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 31.

<sup>606</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 8.

particularly the spiritual life. I shall now examine some texts that consider the ways in which the divine may appear to be masked or hidden.

### **The masks of a hidden god and the path to transformation**

In *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology*, Joseph Campbell argues for an understanding of deity from the point of view of the cultural history of primitive peoples. Campbell speaks of the way in which all religions have arisen from a pool of ‘mythological motifs’.<sup>607</sup> The use of a mask in a festival, he explains, is there to suggest to those taking part in the festivities that the ‘mythical being’ that is represented by the individual wearing the mask is actually present. The mask, he tells us, is respected and revered as an apparition of the mythical figure. In the theatrical performance, a shift takes place from the ‘normal secular sphere’ where each have their own roles, to another level where they are *experienced* as being that which they pretend to be.<sup>608</sup> Otto describes the fascination that is present in the numinous when he refers to ‘the Dionysian element in the numen’:

The daemonic divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm [...] the mystery is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him, something that transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often to the pitch of dizzy intoxication.<sup>609</sup>

Otto sees the experience as designating the element in the numen that can be compared with experiences found in the cult of Dionysius, the Greek god of fertility and wine who was famed for his ecstatic and riotous behaviour. For Otto there is, in the encounter with the numinous, something beyond the purely rational, normal, and secular. There is something that transports the subject to another realm, perhaps as in the case of those, who by wearing the masks to which I referred, enter into the spirit of the occasion, albeit in the imagination. However, the power of the imagination should not be underestimated. Just as

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<sup>607</sup> Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (London: Souvenir Press, 1973).

<sup>608</sup> Campbell, *The Masks of God*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>609</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 31.

in the primitive experience, so to can the deity enter into modern life. Here Otto is saying that things have not changed greatly and there is a long line of tradition among all religions that positively involves religious experience. Campbell may persuade us to believe that the spectators of the primitive festival feel that the wearer of the mask embodies the deity, but Otto has to persuade us, as intelligent beings, that the non-rational God, of whom he speaks, is in fact more than a product of our imagination and a jaunt into the realms of the mystical. I shall now use the thinking of the psychologist and philosopher Erich Neumann (1905-1960) to help provide a better understanding of Otto's theory.

Neumann's essay 'Mystical Man', contained within Campbell's collection *The Mystic Vision*, presents the former's own research interests involving the human psyche, and the study relates to Otto's thinking on the numinous. Neumann speaks of the 'mystical man' and gives his own elucidating account of the numinous, which I shall now put forward. The human subject, in Neumann's thinking, is 'the vehicle of mystical phenomena' or '*homo mysticus*',<sup>610</sup> and he explores the relationship of ancient myths to the development of human psychology. Neumann raises a pivotal question as a basis for his inquiry. What he seeks to ascertain is to what extent the mystical can be understood as a general phenomenon, and how far the human subject can be understood to be *homo mysticus*. There is an honest recognition of the limitations of such an inquiry and also a search for what Neumann sees as humanity's experience of the relativity of his place in the world. With this in mind, he claims that 'absolute statements' are not now acceptable even though they may have been in the 'naïveté' of former times. Humankind, with its complex mind, has taken centre stage and become 'the man in the middle', similar to Nietzsche's 'superman', who has taken on a new and powerful position of altruism with the rejection of a dominant deity.<sup>611</sup> As a path towards an understanding of the numinous, Neumann speaks of 'a continuous process of transformation' taking place within the human psyche.<sup>612</sup> The subject becomes entwined with the object of the psyche no matter how it may be presenting itself to him/her. An encounter between the ego and the non-ego Neumann sees as having

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<sup>610</sup> Trans. as 'mystical man'.

<sup>611</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. by Thomas Common (New York: Random House Publishers), [s.d.] pp. 6-7.

<sup>612</sup> Erich Neumann, 'Mystical Man', in *The Mystic Vision: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, ed. by Joseph Campbell, trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1968), pp. 375-77.

significance for mystical experience, and he demonstrates this by stating that when the ego ‘renounces conscious reality’ and the world is ‘experienced as contradiction’, such an encounter can then be termed ‘mystical’.<sup>613</sup> The idea of contradiction also features in Otto’s thinking. Firstly there is the contradiction that emerges in terms of a non-rational God in the face of arguments for a rationalistic approach, and secondly the contradictions inherent in the numinous encounter, which while they may be described as transcendent, are at the same time immanent.<sup>614</sup> Neumann offers his own view of the possibilities of mystical experience and goes on to develop his thinking further on the numinous. An experience of this state, according to Neumann, leads to a sense of fascination and change in the personality. Neumann envisages a new and different approach to life for the one who encounters the numen and makes great claims for the distinct changes that come about in the subject. For instance, we’re told that an individual who may be termed mystical is likely to be called religious, since throughout their life they encounter the numinous. Neumann claims that where the ego confronts the numinous, the former will go ‘outside itself’ and return eventually in a changed form. It could be assumed that an experience of the numinous is incumbent upon one having a religious frame of mind. However, for Neumann, such a state of consciousness in terms of a belief in the divine is not necessary, since the phenomenon goes beyond religious experience and can manifest itself in ‘atheistic’, pantheistic, and materialist forms of mystical experience. Such a claim prompts consideration of the ways in which the numinous manifests itself, and whether the sublime could be said to resonate with it, since experiences of the sublime are mainly reported as secular, as explored in Chapter One of my work. Neumann emphasises that for every ‘consciousness and ego the numinous is that which is “entirely different”’, suggesting that no two experiences of the numinous are the same.<sup>615</sup> According to Neumann there is, therefore, no set pattern that can be recognised when considering the numinous. However, what may be called side effects have a similarity in both the sublime and the numinous, where awe, fear, and terror are said to accompany these encounters (see Chapter Two on Otto and the eighteenth-century theorists). Ways in which the numinous and the sublime are manifested has significance in terms of my research question, as I explore Otto’s

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<sup>613</sup> Neumann, ‘Mystical Man’, p. 380.

<sup>614</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 1.

<sup>615</sup> Neumann, ‘Mystical Man’, pp. 380-82.

understanding of the *mysterium tremendum*. This will now be attempted through a consideration of Neumann's significant and important question of the hiddenness of the divine. I shall further explore this mystery in relation to what he says and also to the way in which Otto interprets the phrase.

Neumann speaks of the 'creative void' that is central to humanity's mystical experience. At this juncture there is a meeting of the Godhead and the *anthropos* (άνθρωπος), or 'man'. For Neumann, the mysticism of theology and anthropology intersect, and the void of which he speaks is where experience of the mystical is found. It is this creative force that determined the Judeo-Christian idea of 'creation out of nothingness', as it is a place where the godhead and humanity work together and where 'mystical theology and mystical anthropology coincide'.<sup>616</sup> An example of this co-operation between God and humanity is found in the biblical Book of Exodus, where the patriarch Abraham is called to make a covenant with God following the promise to Abraham that he will have descendants and possession of his own land. The details of the covenant have a mystical tone and involve animal sacrifice. As evening falls, Abraham is overcome by a deep sleep and we are told that 'fear and terror' came over him. As the sun sets, fire passes between the animals that Abraham has dissected, and it is at this point that God's covenant with Abraham is sealed.<sup>617</sup> Such an agreement was called a suzerainty covenant and denoted some, if limited, equality between the two parties. The fear and terror that Abraham experienced resembles the fear and terror related in eighteenth-century accounts of the phenomenon of the sublime and also in Otto's writing on the *mysterium tremendum*. That which can be discerned in Abraham's experience is, especially in terms of the *mysterium tremendum*, a sign of the holy. A further sign of the holy breaking in to Abraham's life is referred to by Soren Kierkegaard in his book *Fear and Trembling*, in which the author explores Abraham's faith in the face of the terrifying thought that God wants him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac.<sup>618</sup> Kierkegaard considers the difference between one who may be understood as a 'tragic hero' and Abraham. While the tragic hero finds a place within that which is termed ethical, Abraham, on the other hand, 'overstepped

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<sup>616</sup>Neumann, 'Mystical Man', p. 383.

<sup>617</sup> Genesis 15. 4-18.

<sup>618</sup> Genesis 22.

the ethical entirely and possesses a higher *telos*<sup>619</sup> outside of it, in relation to which he suspended the former'.<sup>620</sup> The 'higher *telos*' of which Kierkegaard speaks is concerned with Abraham as an individual, who in spite of the dread he feels at the prospect of sacrificing his son is totally committed to doing what he believes to be the will of God. However, once Abraham's faith and obedience survive the test, the hidden God is revealed and Abraham sacrifices a ram in place of his son.<sup>621</sup> I will now return to Neumann and his consideration of the hiddenness of God.

### **Neumann and the veiled god**

Neumann links his idea concerning the hidden nature of the deity with the 'creative process'. Here he is not focusing simply on the creation myths in the biblical Book of Genesis, but also on the possibilities of the 'mystical experience which circles around the hiddenness of the godhead'.<sup>622</sup> To go back to Abraham's covenant experience, it was one that had meaning and significance, but it was also uncanny and had the hallmarks of what Otto calls the wholly other, but at the same time it was not a direct revelation of the Godhead but one that was instead covert. The veiled aspect of God continues as a prominent theme in Neumann's analysis of a God who is concealed, and he employs his background in human psychology to explain his thinking about epiphany and hiddenness in conceiving of the deity:

The epiphany<sup>623</sup> of that which had hitherto been hidden requires not only an ego to which it can manifest itself, but, to an even greater degree, calls for an act of attention and devotion on the part of the ego, an aptitude for being "moved", a willingness to see what wants to appear. Man is the partner of the numinous, for only in man can the numinous epiphany unfold.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Trans. as 'end' or 'aim'.

<sup>620</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness unto Death*, trans. by Walter Lowrie (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 69.

<sup>621</sup> Genesis 22.

<sup>622</sup> Neumann, 'Mystical Man', p. 383.

<sup>623</sup> From φάινω: 'to be brought forth into light' or 'to appear'; *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, p. 31.

<sup>624</sup> Neumann, 'Mystical Man', p. 382.

It would be easy to think, especially in light of the religious specific language that Neumann uses (e.g., ‘epiphany’ and ‘devotion’), that the numinous is reserved for those of a religious frame of mind. However, Neumann suggests no such restriction and the phenomenon of the numinous is available, in his thinking, to the secular mind of the atheist and the materialist.<sup>625</sup> I now turn to Otto’s approach to the ways in which the numinous can be expressed and to the power of sublime language.

### **The language of the numinous and the sublime**

One of Otto’s prime examples of the expression of the numinous comes from the Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah, as I established in Chapter One of this thesis when considering the context of Otto’s thought. However, it is worth re-considering here in light of my further research. In order to demonstrate his point, Otto turns to what he calls ‘holy situations’. The expectation Otto has is that a person should, on hearing a particular part of chapter six of Isaiah’s prophesy, ‘*feel* what the numinous is’. Otto uses Luther’s words to reinforce his argument, stating that if such feeling is lacking then no ‘preaching, singing, telling, will be of any use’.<sup>626</sup> The particular chapter in Isaiah to which he refers requires, according to him, the *viva vox*, more so than any other.<sup>627</sup> Direct means of communicating the numinous are therefore best achieved by bringing powerful words to bear on the attentive and sensitive hearer.<sup>628</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, Longinus put to his readers the effects of powerful words and writing in his *Peri Hypsous*. Sublime language was certainly capable of elevating speakers and listeners beyond the ordinary, to a state of ecstasy and even transcendence. A similarity emerges between the powerful pronouncements of Isaiah, which took place in the eighth century BCE, and the distinguished rhetoric of later orators. Longinus was not one to deny divine inspiration in his descriptions of great oratory.<sup>629</sup> Divine inspiration was part of the creative process that led the orator to transport those to whom he spoke. Doran notes this aspect of Longinus’s

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<sup>625</sup> Neumann, ‘Mystical Man’, p. 381.

<sup>626</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>627</sup> Trans. as ‘spoken word’.

<sup>628</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>629</sup> Murray and Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. xlvii.

work in respect of the sublime: ‘Sublimity [*hypsos*] raises us toward the spiritual greatness of God’.<sup>630</sup> A question that arises is whether the sublime grew out of existing forms of rhetoric. The Hebrew prophets, as an example, knew what it was to fall into states of ecstasy and to deliver a message, understood as coming from Yahweh, and yet they are not recorded as having undergone any particular training. There were, however, groups known as the Sons of the Prophets who attached themselves to a well-known prophet, an example of which is found in chapter six of the second Book of Kings.<sup>631</sup> However, the prophet Amos, when referring to his call to be a prophet, tells the king’s officer the following:

I am not the kind of prophet who prophesies for pay. I am a herdsman and I take care of fig trees. But the Lord took me from my work as a shepherd and ordered me to go and prophesy to this people, Israel.<sup>632</sup>

Ancient prophets differed from later political orators, and the difference occurred in the nature of the words which were spoken. As far as ancient prophesy went, the very words spoken had the power within them to bring particular outcomes to pass.<sup>633</sup> It is debateable whether this can be understood to be the same as the sublime rhetoric of which Longinus spoke. A helpful approach is presented by Doran as he questions the traditional English translation of *hypsos* as ‘the sublime’ or ‘sublimity’. A more appropriate, satisfactory, and literal English equivalent to *hypsos* he finds to be ‘height’, ‘elevation’, or ‘loftiness’.<sup>634</sup> As Doran states:

The image of height allows *hypsos* to function as a metaphor for certain attributes of mind or expression, such as “elevated thoughts” or “a lofty passage”, attributes also associated with a noble or high-minded disposition. As Longinus understands it, *hypsos* thus connotes a kind of outstripping of oneself in terms of one’s mental

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<sup>630</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 36.

<sup>631</sup> 2 Kings 6.1.

<sup>632</sup> Amos 7.14-16.

<sup>633</sup> 1 Kings 18. 30-38. The prophet Elijah, by his actions and words, causes fire to come down upon the altar he has prepared.

<sup>634</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 39.

capacity or state of mind, a going beyond normal human limits in the sense of being proximate to the divine.<sup>635</sup>

Apart from linguistic expression, then, Longinus is associating the sublime with elevated feelings. However, it provides a different slant on the subject of the nature of language when it is considered in light of divine inspiration or otherwise. Forceful language that raises the spirits, whether in ancient prophesy or political rhetoric, calls for a sensitive hearer and this was the case in the time of Isaiah, Longinus, and beyond.

### **Facing the numinous and discovering the holy**

The prophet Isaiah can certainly be understood as a *sensitive* hearer, and in chapter six he describes his phenomenal experience in the temple: ‘In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting on a throne’.<sup>636</sup> Using potent language, the prophet goes on to describe his experience of the essence of the holy. Isaiah, in a highly emotional and agitated state, bemoans his own and his people’s state of sin. Fear and an awareness of his own uncleanness, together with that of the people among whom he lives, dominate Isaiah’s experience. There is no hope in Isaiah’s thoughts about the nation. However, the whole occurrence was part of his call to be a prophet, which he willingly took up. Chapter six in the writings of the prophet Isaiah has had significance for Christians as well as Jews. The theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965), in one of his sermons, speaks of chapter six in the work of Isaiah as ‘one of the greatest’ in the Old Testament.<sup>637</sup> The words in the chapter specify Isaiah’s sense of awe in the presence of holiness as he is called to his vocation of preaching. Here we can recall again the mystery of the hidden God. For Isaiah the revelation of God is also what Tillich calls a ‘veiling’ of God, since although phenomenon is experienced by Isaiah in the form of ‘flaming creatures’, a temple filled with smoke, and a shaking of the foundations, he experiences the holiness of God. However, Tillich argues that he does not see God, who continues to remain hidden. Isaiah’s response is one of shock and dismay as he is overwhelmed with terror and awe. In the face of the awful

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<sup>635</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 39.

<sup>636</sup> Isaiah 6.1.

<sup>637</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (London: SCM Press, 1949), p. 88.

holiness, Isaiah, who is aware of his own impurity and that of humankind, takes up his vocation through the call to prophesy.<sup>638</sup> The effect of an encounter with the holy warrants some further explanation, and Tillich gives his own analysis of this. The fact that Isaiah is aware of his own uncleanness and unworthiness in the face of a holy God prompts Tillich to consider this in respect of what Isaiah saw as humankind's impurity. Isaiah, acutely aware of his own shortcomings and of his 'unclean lips', identifies with those among whom he lives and yet is the one who is found worthy of this inordinate vision. Isaiah's vision has all the hallmarks of an encounter with the *mysterium tremendum*.

I have considered the 'direct means' that Otto and Tillich claim are employed in respect of the expressions of the numinous. Now, with further reference to Otto and the thinking of Phillip Blond, I shall look at the 'indirect means' by which the numinous and the sublime are presented.<sup>639</sup>

When considering the ways in which religion has been represented throughout the ages, Otto sees conflicting and at times confusing evidence in which notions of the deity have been communicated. For example, he speaks of the 'fearful' and 'horrible', the 'revolting and the loathsome', and uses these adjectives to describe primitive images of gods.<sup>640</sup> With these examples, Otto discerns a likeness to the *tremendum* and states, 'their outlets and means of expression may become indirect modes of expressing the specific "numinous awe" that cannot be expressed directly'.<sup>641</sup> He gives the example of Durga, the 'great Mother' of Bengal from the Indian Pantheon, who is fearful to look upon and yet inspires 'devotional awe'.<sup>642</sup> Fierceness is recognised by Otto in the icon of an ancient Byzantine Madonna, who is capable of appealing to the imagination of orthodox Catholic worshippers much more so than the Madonnas painted by Raphael. A further model of expression found by Otto is that which can be understood as having an appearance of 'grandeur' or 'sublimity'. Here, 'terror' and 'dread' seem to be superseded, as in the story from Isaiah's prophesy, where Otto sees a firm relationship established between the

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<sup>638</sup> Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, pp. 87-92. The word 'aweful' in this context, and with this spelling, I use here to denote 'filled with awe'.

<sup>639</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 61.

<sup>640</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 62.

<sup>641</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 62.

<sup>642</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 62.

sublime and the holy. I have considered this relationship between the sublime and the holy in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, but have revisited it in light of my consideration of the way in which Otto links fearsomeness with ancient and modern ways of worship.<sup>643</sup> However, as I pointed out in Chapter Four, Otto was convinced that religious feelings are very different from aesthetic feelings, and with this thought in mind I shall consider Phillip Blond's argument relating to the sublime.

### **The sublime and aspirations of transcendency**

Phillip Blond speaks of 'a relationship with the higher that can only be described as sublime'.<sup>644</sup> Presumably, 'the higher' refers to a relationship with a deity. However, Blond goes on to show that in spite of the elevated thought of the sublime it is still, in his thinking, secular thought and it 'cannot dispense with the higher possibilities of transcendence'.<sup>645</sup> Blond states that the 'source of the sublime does not lie in external objects but originates rather within the sphere of rationality with the ideas of reason'.<sup>646</sup> While the question arises as to whether the sublime can be thought of as transcendent thought, Blond considers this not the case. Although there may be a claim for 'mutual foundations', the sublime fails to be an encounter with transcendence, and as a result of its limitations becomes idolatrous and 'can only project the beyond as a negative image of its own (self) limitation'.<sup>647</sup> One explanation for Blond's position is that he finds the sublime to be non-theistic. He goes on to accuse the sublime, along with other secular 'political, social and philosophical movements', as seeking to validate themselves by embracing 'that which transcends them'.<sup>648</sup> Blond's accusation highlights what he sees as the futility of the sublime to equate itself with the transcendent even though for modernity it provides what appears to be transcendency. He states, 'The sublime delivers what is taken to be, for modernity, the

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<sup>643</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>644</sup> Phillip Blond, ed., *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>645</sup> Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>646</sup> Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy*, p. 15.

<sup>647</sup> Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy*, p. 16.

<sup>648</sup> Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy*, p. 16.

transcendent experience *par excellence*, the congruence of terror and vacuity'.<sup>649</sup> Blond's thinking suggests that the sublime is presumptuous in aligning itself with transcendence or with any idea of the beyond at all.<sup>650</sup> Attempts to describe the ineffable, whether by means of the sublime or the numinous, are varied and many. I now go on to consider the ineffable and the ways in which it relates to the self.

### **The ineffable – 'a notoriously elusive concept'**

Silvia Jonas speaks of ineffability as a concept that is a continuing puzzle to the minds of philosophers. The challenge of the ineffable, Jonas claims, has become a 'nonissue in contemporary philosophy' as a result of the scientific mindset that focuses on analysis and logic.<sup>651</sup> Jonas proposes what she calls 'Self-acquaintance' as a means of explaining the metaphysics of ineffability, and she makes five claims for her proposal, the first four of which are: 1) the Existence Claim (i.e. the self), 2) the Acquaintance Claim, of which she states the possibility of standing in an acquaintance relationship with the self in order to gain phenomenal knowledge of one's self, 3) the Ineffability Claim, which is to do with self-acquaintance and is ineffable as phenomenal knowledge, and 4) the Importance Claim, which is concerned with the significance we attach to moments of self-acquaintance and the object with which we get acquainted. Jonas defends her Importance Claim in terms of the importance we attach to experiences of ineffability: 'The Self is the ultimate reference point for every human being. This fact alone is enough to explain why moments where we get acquainted with it feel extraordinary, important, and meaningful'.<sup>652</sup> Such moments occur when the sublime or the numinous is experienced. Jonas goes on to describe her fifth claim, the Metaphysics Claim, which is the metaphysics of ineffability, explained in terms of self-acquaintance.<sup>653</sup> Guy Bennett-Hunter, in his analysis of Jonas's book, states that Jonas explains the metaphysics of ineffability in terms of a particular kind of ineffable knowledge, self-acquaintance, which she suggests 'explains our paradigmatic cases of

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<sup>649</sup> Blond, *Post Secular Philosophy*, p. 16.

<sup>650</sup> Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy*, p. 16.

<sup>651</sup> Silvia Jonas, *Ineffability and Its Metaphysics: The Unspeakable in Art, Religion, and Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 1.

<sup>652</sup> Jonas, *Ineffability and Its Metaphysics*, p. 174.

<sup>653</sup> Jonas, *Ineffability and Its Metaphysics*, p. 167.

philosophically intriguing ineffability, as found in aesthetic, religious and philosophical contexts'.<sup>654</sup> Jonas asks the question: 'Can art, religion, or philosophy afford ineffable insights – and if so what are they?'<sup>655</sup> Her answer is a resounding 'yes', since these insights are occasions when we become acquainted with ourselves. Such a comment resonates with my discussion on Neumann's work earlier in this chapter. However, while Jonas's new philosophical theory on ineffability arouses expectation, she gives little advice on how it might be applied. Nevertheless, Bennett-Hunter acknowledges her concession that her theory 'is clearly unable to accommodate every possible interpretation of a given ineffable religious experience', but as Jonas suggests 'self-acquaintance could serve as a "minimal metaphysics" of religious ineffability on which both theist and atheist could agree'.<sup>656</sup> Something of a self-acquaintance occurs in Newman's work as the mind is captured for a moment, and the senses are suspended while the experience is assimilated. Something similar also occurs, for example, in the writing of the British novelist, poet, and translator Helen Maria Williams (1761-1827), as she describes a scene from her tour of Switzerland: 'It was not without the most powerful emotion that, for the first time, I cast my eyes on that solemn, that majestic vision, the Alps!'<sup>657</sup> Williams's experience can be compared to the effects of numinous encounter, where the mind is suddenly harnessed and challenged to consider a phenomenon. When it comes to dread and terror, one could not say for sure that the sublime invokes the same level of dread and terror as the numinous and its encounter with the other, and so there do seem to be some common features in both phenomena.

Otherness, then, makes its appearance, whether through religious experience or through works of art or nature. Blond considers 'distance' and his view is that an experience of 'distance' between God and humanity is a necessary consequence of the latter's love of God: 'This distance is initiated, not so that He can separate himself from us, but so that He can come to us as our most intimate and genuine possibility'.<sup>658</sup> Blond's words shed some light on the argument I have been putting forward. He asks us to accept

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<sup>654</sup> Guy Bennett-Hunter, 'New Work on Ineffability', *The Expository Times* (1, 2016), 128, pp. 30-32.

<sup>655</sup> Jonas, *Ineffability and Its Metaphysics*, p. 181.

<sup>656</sup> Bennett-Hunter, *The Expository Times*, p. 31.

<sup>657</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 303.

<sup>658</sup> Blond, *Post-Secular Philosophy*, p. 35.

that this hidden God is keeping humanity at a distance for humanity's own good. I have previously considered the significance of 'distance' in Chapter Two when discussing Burke's theory of the sublime. For Burke, certain sights, even if they present danger in close proximity, can be enjoyed so long as the subject is at a safe distance. It would seem that the deity is also at a distance from humankind, and so does this distance relate, at all, to the transcendent? I will now explore further the notion of transcendence.

Otto considers the concept of transcendence in his chapter on *Divination in Christianity Today*.<sup>659</sup> Here, where he speaks of the suffering of the righteous man Job, Otto finds a 'proximity' of the 'transcendent, mysterious and beyondness of God'.<sup>660</sup> Thus even in the remoteness and seeming disinterestedness that appear apparent in innocent suffering, for Otto this hidden God lurks with good intent. With the suffering of Job in mind and that of Christ also, Otto sees the elements of the rational and non-rational interwoven. For Otto extreme suffering, as in the case of Job and Christ, perpetuate 'the guiltless suffering of the righteous' that is so predominant throughout the Old Testament, for example in the lives of the prophets and in the Book of Psalms.<sup>661</sup> Although steeped in mystery and quite non-rational, righteous suffering appears to carry merit and holds some solution, assuming a solution is necessary to humanity's ultimate destiny. There appears to be, then, something that is both mystical and beyond the physical world, and to explore this more fully I will now consider further aspects of Lyotard's thinking.

Lyotard uses the Greek *anagogy* (αναγωγή),<sup>662</sup> a word that Lyotard considers to be important to bible readers. It is to do with presenting one's own idea of a word whether it be in a passage of scripture or in poetry. The word also refers to a seeking beyond that which is literal or concerned with allegory or the moral sense of a word. It can be understood as an attempt to capture something of what we call phenomena or an experience

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<sup>659</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 162-178.

<sup>660</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p.173.

<sup>661</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 173.

<sup>662</sup> Trans. as 'reduction'. The word *anaginōskō* (ἀναγινώσκω), which has the same root as αναγωγή, is found in New Testament scriptures and refers to 'read/ reading'. It is primarily to do with 'to know certainly, to know again, recognise'. In 2 Cor. 1.13, the Apostle Paul writes 'οὐγάρ ἄλλα γράφομεν ὑμῖν ἄλλ ἢ ἃ ἀναγινώσκετε ἢ καὶ ἐπιγινώσκετε' ('we write none other things unto you, than what you read'), signifying that there is no hidden or mysterious meaning in Paul's Epistle. Paul's words are contrary to those of Lyotard, since the latter suggests that there is something beyond the text. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary*, pp. 507-08.

‘charged with aura’ and potency.<sup>663</sup> The subject, living the experience, is carried along by the impact of the phenomenon, which makes a claim on her/him. Such an experience is, according to Jobling, Pippin, and Schleifer’s interpretation of Lyotard’s views in *The Post Modern Condition*, the *mysterium tremendum* encounter with the sacred.<sup>664</sup> Jobling, Pippin, and Schleifer infer that Lyotard seeks to recover a sense of the sacred in the world, which would involve that which is ‘beyond and within the secular order of Enlightenment knowledge, ethics and experience’.<sup>665</sup> However, they mistakenly focus on *mysterium tremendum* when Lyotard’s discussion was in fact concerned with the sublime. As Lyotard argues:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste that would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.<sup>666</sup>

The ‘unrepresentable’ is not necessarily the *mysterium tremendum*. However, while Lyotard is a secular thinker his thought might have theological implications. Lyotard’s view of modern aesthetics is as a nostalgic aesthetic of the sublime. For him, the ‘real sublime sentiment’ is an ‘intrinsic combination of pleasure and pain: the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, [and] the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept’.<sup>667</sup> Making reference to modern painting, Lyotard articulates his understanding of the sublime, as I have explained, as that which can present the unrepresentable. This is the same as modern art’s attempts to show that there is a place for the unrepresentable which makes the point that there is something capable of being conceived. Jobling, Pippin, and Schleifer interpret Lyotard’s discussion as taking the concept of the sublime somewhat closer than one might expect to the concept of *mysterium tremendum*, and they state that his work calls for ‘a severe re-examination’ to be imposed

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<sup>663</sup> David Jobling, Tina Pippin, and Ronald Schleifer, eds. *The Post Modern Bible Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp. 2-3.

<sup>664</sup> Jobling, Pippin, and Schleifer, *The Post Modern Bible Reader*, p. 3.

<sup>665</sup> Jobling, Pippin, and Schleifer, *The Post Modern Bible Reader*, p. 8.

<sup>666</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 81.

<sup>667</sup> Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition*, p. 81.

upon enlightenment thinking.<sup>668</sup> But how can such a re-examination of enlightenment thinking make a difference in establishing greater respect and understanding of the sacred in the world?

### **The sacred discovered**

In light of Lyotard's challenge, and in order to give some answer to the place of the sacred in the world over and against the thinking of the Enlightenment, I now refer to the theologian and literary critic David Jasper, particularly his work *The Sacred Desert*, in which he directs us to Kant's essay 'What is the Enlightenment?' (1784). For many who are not familiar with the Enlightenment, Kant's question is pertinent. Jasper goes on to elucidate, appending Kant's advice, stating 'Dare to know', or put more simply, 'think for yourself'. For Kant this was the maxim he attributed to the Enlightenment, which he considered to be a new era of autonomy for humankind. Jasper makes an important point as he presents the fact that Western thinking has 'begun to lose faith in the reason which sets the self at the centre of all things'.<sup>669</sup> The art of Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman present, for Jasper, an epiphany, brought about by the life challenges they have met, which have resulted in them moving away from Enlightenment thinking 'to the spaces of the mind as it meets the wholly "other" and is utterly lost'.<sup>670</sup> There is further help offered, to the inquirer, in terms of the artist's work. Here the opportunity arises to enter into the spirit of the paintings:

We are *of* the picture, and one with it, yet we remain *detached*, the gazer who merely stands looking. We are then, both inside and outside the picture, and cannot be the one without being utterly the other. We become wholly ourselves only in the wholly other.<sup>671</sup>

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<sup>668</sup> Lyotard, *The Post Modern Condition*, p. 8.

<sup>669</sup> David Jasper, *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>670</sup> Jasper, *The Sacred Desert*, p. 118.

<sup>671</sup> Jasper, *The Sacred Desert*, p. 122.

In order for an experience of the sublime, and even more so for an experience of the *mysterium tremendum* to take place, something extraordinary must be going on. Something extraordinary must also be taking place when an experience of being ‘at one’ with works of art occurs as I have discussed earlier in this chapter, and I now return to this to explore the idea further.

The experience of being at one, as it were, with works of art, has something in common with the numinous and the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and can also help the viewer to enter a transcendental state. Certain paintings can be capable of moving the human spirit beyond the earthly and hold a fascination for the viewer. For example, the writer Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), it is said, had to be supported by his wife as he almost collapsed while he gazed upon a painting of Christ taken down from the cross. Tolstoy’s experience resonates with Jasper’s description of the ‘pure abstraction’ of Rothko’s paintings. Although Tolstoy gazed upon a figure that moved him deeply, he was nevertheless entering into the oneness with the painting of which Jasper speaks. As the latter states:

As we gaze at these pictures, we become one with the monk who gazes at the sea or the illimitable desert, our attitude, like that of Rothko himself, one of Kantian detachment, but more than that, with a disinterestedness that is akin to the religious contemplation of the infinite and the sublime.<sup>672</sup>

The gaze therefore holds within itself the possibility of uniting the subject with the object in a concrete and natural state. By this means, the subject is elevated to a state beyond the ordinary, to a state of transcendence. Here, Jasper is indicating that the sublime has within it something akin to religion.

I shall later re-consider some eighteenth-century theorists’ narratives on the sublime in light of my previous paragraphs. Before doing so, however, I must state that Otto accepted the concept of the sublime as having something mysterious in it and therefore, as far as he is concerned, it is like the numinous. According to Otto, the sublime also has a ‘dual character’, just as the numinous has, and while it is ‘daunting’ it still has some

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<sup>672</sup> Jasper, *The Sacred Desert*, p. 122.

attraction for the subject.<sup>673</sup> Otto makes it clear that the analogy between the numinous and the sublime is one between religion and aesthetics.<sup>674</sup> As I have previously stated, the numinous is generally understood to have a relationship with religion, and I am inclined to adhere to this, in spite of Neumann's argument to liberate it beyond religious experience. I suggest that it can express itself in other forms such as atheism, pantheism, and materialism. It gradually appears that there is a fine line between an understanding of the numinous and the sublime and this is an important finding for my thesis as a whole, which will be examined further in Chapter Six. For the present I shall stay with the sublime as a secular phenomenon and later discuss its relationship to *ekstasis*.<sup>675</sup> Laurence Paul Hemming makes an important point, stating:

The sublime indicates a seeking of what is most 'beingful' and divine in what there is to be experienced and known. Because sublimity has been understood in this way, it has been taken as a name for transcendence. And here is the ambiguity.<sup>676</sup>

With Hemming's views in mind I shall now discuss the ambiguity between the sublime and transcendence.

### **Ambiguity, poetry, passions, and the sublime**

Hemming's work aims to uncover the perceived ambiguity between ideas of the sublime and transcendence and to answer the question of the validity of the sublime and its seeming aspirations to transcendence. The very title of Hemming's book seems to divide the sublime, a secular concept, and the transcendent that is generally understood to be a religious idea. However, it begs the question as to whether there is such a thing as non-religious transcendence. Brady finds a way to identify ideas that can be termed religious, to take on the mantle of the sublime and that is if they are connected to mysterious powers, for example gods, demons, spirits, and miracles. She refers us to John Dennis, who finds sublimity in his own religious ideas about God, especially when he is concerned with

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<sup>673</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>674</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 40.

<sup>675</sup> Trans. as 'ecstasy'.

<sup>676</sup> Laurence Paul Hemming, *Postmodernity's Transcending* (London: SCM Press, 2005), p. 8.

‘infinite power, infinite good and even an angry God’.<sup>677</sup> Dennis makes a link between terror and religion, between the sacred and the secular. I considered Dennis’s contribution to the notion of the sublime and religion in Chapter Two of this thesis and I now consider how he claims that great religious poetry, such as Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, can assert its authority over and superiority to the works of the ancients. Dennis does not make much use of the word sublime, due to the fact, as Doran shows, that it ‘had not yet become a critical concept in England’.<sup>678</sup> However, Dennis claimed sacredness for poetry and shows that passion must be the dominant emotion within it. He goes on to assert that the passion felt must be ‘distinct’ from what may be termed ‘ordinary passion’, and consequently in his view those subjects we call sacred have a greater susceptibility to passion. However, he does allow that the subjects preferred by the ancients ‘in their greater poetry’, which he saw as deriving from ‘their own natures, or by their manner of handling them’, also had a sacredness about them.<sup>679</sup> For Dennis, poetry is ‘the natural language of religion’.<sup>680</sup> These comments offered by Dennis subtly suggest some relationship between that which is sublime and transports the soul ‘from its ordinary situation’, as Longinus claims, and the passion inherent in religious poetry, which at its height transcends the ordinary. While one may make a distinction between the sublime and the sacred, Dennis allows for some integration of the two.<sup>681</sup> Just as notable is the approach taken by Lord Shaftesbury following his tour of the Alps in 1686. Shaftesbury held nature to be the beginning point in the development of his aesthetic theory and proposes a connection between God and the sublime:

All nature’s wonders serve to excite and perfect this idea of their author. It is here he suffers us to see and even converse with him, in a manner suitable to our frailty. How glorious it is to contemplate him, in this noblest of his works apparent to us, the system of the bigger world!<sup>682</sup>

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<sup>677</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 37.

<sup>678</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 128.

<sup>679</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 33.

<sup>680</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 137.

<sup>681</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>682</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, pp. 74-75.

Shaftesbury goes on to heights of ecstasy as he contemplates the beauty of the starry sky, attributing its creation to a *being* whose ‘immensity’ is taught via his works, as he delights to say in his contemplation of the sun, ‘which shining now full out, gives us new life, exalts our spirits, and makes us feel *divinity* more present’.<sup>683</sup> Here there is a joy and satisfaction in Shaftesbury’s experience, since he can attribute all the beauty of nature to his own understanding of a creator God. For Addison there was a similar understanding, as the experiences that nature provides led him to contemplate greatness, the creator, and the eternal.

What Addison is saying on these points is that the greatness of God, although not openly seen, is yet anticipated by our contemplation of states of nature that we might call great. However, humanity’s ultimate happiness, for Addison, lies in the being of God himself, which suggests the ability to reflect at a level beyond the purely natural.<sup>684</sup> Addison’s thinking resonates with my discussion on the ‘hidden God’ presented earlier in this chapter. Seeing God in natural surroundings such as nature, especially in its greatness, can be one way of experiencing the numinous. To experience phenomena without using God as a default mechanism may be a convenient way to interpret the sublime. However, a sense of the sublime or the numinous can be accompanied by a feeling of *ekstasis* (ἐκσταση),<sup>685</sup> and although I have briefly mentioned the concept of ecstasy in Chapter Two, I shall now explore it more fully in light of further research, since it has relevance for both the sublime and the numinous.

*Ekstasis*, or ecstasy, can be defined as an intensified or heightened state of being, and can also be described as a sense of elation, delight, or bliss. Such experiences are recorded, as I have shown, in the writings of Longinus and eighteenth-century theorists on the sublime. The idea of *ekstasis* has a history in Greek culture. It was originally understood to mean, as Doran indicates from the writings of M. A. Screech, something that is thrown down from its usual place. Later meanings involved distraction which occurred as result of strong emotions relating to terror. As a recipient of such emotions, the subject may

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<sup>683</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 75.

<sup>684</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 63.

<sup>685</sup> Trans. as ‘ecstasy’.

have expected to receive visions from the gods.<sup>686</sup> The examples I have given suggest some instances of the divine breaking in to the normal everyday human condition. The sublime, however, when experienced, is a displacement from the norm of experience. Burke points out that there is an *intensity* associated with sublimity leading to its associated terror. According to Doran, Longinus understands that *hypsos* relates to ‘the gods or the divine’ on the one hand, as an experience of transcendence, whereas on the other hand he sees it as ‘largely secular’.<sup>687</sup> However, Doran goes on to state, ‘at bottom the sublime involves an essential equivocation between aesthetic-secular and mystical-religious experience, which allows it to function as a secular analog of religious transcendence’.<sup>688</sup> His statement makes some progress in the discovery of the kernel of a relationship between the sublime and the numinous. However, the statement still presents a huge dichotomy between what can be called secular and what can be termed religious in the consideration of these two elements of human experience. Doran suggests that Longinus’s legacy is to attempt to cross the boundary between the rhetorical and the aesthetical sublime.<sup>689</sup> In an attempt to understand and clarify Longinus’s position, I shall look again at Burke’s *Enquiry*.

### **Burke, Doran, and Brady**

In Part Two of his *Enquiry*, Burke directs his address to the prevalent passion of astonishment experienced by the subject in contemplation of that which he calls great and sublime in nature. Doran suggests that Burke is attempting to keep in line with the thinking of Addison and Longinus by using the terms ‘sublimity’ and ‘grandeur’ interchangeably. Here we find Burke completing, according to Doran, ‘the linguistic evolution of the “sublime” from a term used almost exclusively in the analysis of literary texts to one that refers paradigmatically to natural objects in terms of both magnitude and power’.<sup>690</sup> Longinus and Burke both focus on the response of the subject to sublime experience. For

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<sup>686</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 42.

<sup>687</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 43.

<sup>688</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 43.

<sup>689</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 144.

<sup>690</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 145.

Burke it is astonishment that accompanies the sublime and thereby has an effect on the reader or spectator. Longinus uses three significant words to establish his position with respect to the sublime: *ekplexis*, *thaumasion*, and *ekstasis*. The word *ekplexis* (ἐκπλήξις)<sup>691</sup> is used by Longinus in his reference to the experience of sublimity, while *thaumasion* (θαυμάζω) can be understood as having the effect on the subject of wonder, awe, and admiration. *Ekstasis* takes the mind of the subject to a state of ecstasy and transportation.<sup>692</sup> However, Burke sees the strongest and most intense passion experienced by human kind to be fear; therefore, the ruling principle of the sublime he sees as terror, as I have discussed in Chapter Two, and which he equates with fear. However, the sublime presents difficulties in terms of trying to negotiate some pathway between the terror that Burke claims it invokes, and the ecstasy that it is also capable of invoking according to the writings of eighteenth-century theorists.

In light of the ecstasy spoken of in contemplation of the sublime, which I mentioned earlier in this chapter, some consideration should also be given to Burke's account of pleasure and pain, as this has relevance for his aesthetic theory. He sums up all that constitutes the changes in the human condition as being 'different degrees of the same thing, and belong to the ideas of pleasure and pain, delight or uneasiness'.<sup>693</sup> Brady sees Burke's theory of pleasure and pain to be linked with his thinking on an annihilation of society and a lack of desire for humankind to preserve itself. The theory suggests two sides to the same coin, i.e. 'desirable and undesirable passions'. For instance, the emotion of love as inspired by the beautiful would be deemed a desirable passion. The passions that inspire self-preservation are linked to pain and danger and therefore may be called undesirable passions. However, the possibility of enjoyment arises even in dangerous situations, and can be ameliorated by being at some distance from the object or situation that is likely to cause pain, a result of which can lead to the experience of delight coupled with terror. Brady sees in Burke's conclusion of what excites the mixed feeling of pleasure and terror to be an encounter with the sublime.<sup>694</sup> Baillie gives his own definition of what may be called sublime in 'An Essay on the Sublime' (1747), where he defines his topic of

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<sup>691</sup> Trans. as 'astonishment'.

<sup>692</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 145.

<sup>693</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 147.

<sup>694</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 23.

discussion as that which ‘raises the mind to fits of greatness and disposes it to soar above [...] mother earth’.<sup>695</sup> As the mind becomes conscious of its own unlimited vastness, it can, argues Baillie, be called sublime: ‘that object can only be justly called the sublime which in some degree disposes the mind to this enlargement of itself and gives her a lofty conception of her own powers’.<sup>696</sup> Baillie makes an important point regarding the mind and the sublime when he argues, as Brady shows, that ‘different minds have different foci and some are more able to take in the sublime’.<sup>697</sup> This may or may not tie in with Baillie’s theory of the immensity of the mind, but if Baillie’s theory is true concerning the vastness and unlimited expanse of the mind, then can that have any relevance for the mind’s apprehension of the numinous? Otto’s Appendix V examines the Supra-Personal in the numinous but contradicts Baillie’s theory. Whereas in Baillie’s thinking the mind has independence, Otto notes that ‘the numen, blowing in the form of spirit, enters as “*ruach*” and πνεύμα<sup>698</sup> into his chosen, [people] mingling with their spirit, an *antaryamin*<sup>699</sup> in full completion’.<sup>700</sup> The argument I have outlined tends to take us away from any particular relationship between the sublime and the numinous. Alternatively, the vastness of the mind that Baillie speaks of may be an advantage in receiving the *ruach*,<sup>701</sup> or Spirit of God, but such a thought would exclude those who do not have what he calls vast minds. The idea could be understood to suggest a God who, when it comes to revelation, discriminates between those who have great minds and those who do not.

## Conclusion

My aim in this chapter has been to explore more fully the ways in which the sublime and the numinous have been described, along with the emerging relationship between the two concepts. I established Otto’s position in terms of the wholly other in order to prepare the way for an investigation of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* aspect of the numinous

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<sup>695</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 88.

<sup>696</sup> Ashfield and de Bolla, *The Sublime*, p. 88.

<sup>697</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 19.

<sup>698</sup> Trans. as ‘spirit’. This can be understood as the Holy Spirit, which in the early part of the biblical Book of Genesis ‘moved upon the waters’ of chaos; Genesis 1.2.

<sup>699</sup> Trans. as ‘inner- self/ inner guidance’.

<sup>700</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 200.

<sup>701</sup> Trans. as ‘spirit’.

and Otto's sense of that which is beyond the ordinary. According to Otto, the wholly other finds its root in ancient Hindu Scriptures. I described how the wholly other aspect of the numen is intrinsically different from humankind and possesses a dual character. The duality it presents, and which forms part of Otto's argument, lies in its ability not only to attract but to repel. Here we have a dichotomy between the desire to look *at* and the desire to look *away*, a typical response to the *mysterium tremendum*. The two concepts of the numinous and the wholly other emerge at this stage as having some relationship with each other while at the same time having their own distinctive features.

I explored Brady's recent work on the sublime and the numinous and the relationship she finds between the two, especially in their ability to overwhelm the subject. The concepts of the numinous and the sublime both have a sense of mystery in that there is an *ungraspable* aspect to both of them. An example of such mystery was presented through the lens of the Dionysian element in the numen, as shown by Campbell in an attempt to understand the deity. I considered how Campbell refers to the use of masks worn by devotees in primitive cultures to demonstrate the daemonic divine object which, while inciting fear, also allures and suggests the hiddenness of God. However, although Otto and Campbell assert their positions by reference to primitive cultures, the former maintains that in modern life the deity still enters into human experience.

I have examined Neumann's thinking on the numinous and the sublime. For Neumann there is no regular pattern to observe when contemplating the numinous and he does not accept that a religious frame of mind is necessary in order to experience the numinous. His observations lead him to believe that there are side effects attending the numinous, which are awe, fear, and terror. These side effects are also implicit in experiences of the sublime, as I have examined in this chapter when referring to Burke's related ideas on fear. In Neumann, as in Campbell's thinking, there is a continuing veiled aspect to the deity, which is what I would call 'the hiddenness' of God, and I have attempted to unveil some of the hiddenness in my investigations.

Derrida's postmodernist thought finds a place for the *mysterium tremendum*, as it does for the sublime. As I have argued, Derrida considers the effects of an encounter with the *mysterium tremendum*, namely a trembling, and he tells us, 'God is the cause of the

*mysterium tremendum*'.<sup>702</sup> I showed that a further aspect of Derrida's thought is his inclination towards negative theology, an example of which is his consideration of a seemingly absent God; a God who can be better described in terms of what is not known rather than what is or can be known. Nevertheless, he also speaks of humankind as being under the gaze of God and in the hands of God. Derrida's thoughts on the sublime were shaped by his reading of Kant, especially the third *Critique*. Kant's term *parergon* is used by Derrida when explaining the boundlessness of the sublime.

I explored Lyotard's views on the ability of modern painting to present the unrepresentable and stated his conclusion that the sublime sentiment is a mixture of pleasure and pain. Such a conclusion links with traditional understandings of the sublime found in Burke and the thinking of eighteenth-century theorists. Jobling, Pippin, and Schleifer make a significant point in their interpretation of Lyotard's views as taking the sublime nearer to the *mysterium tremendum*.<sup>703</sup> However, while this may be true and even desirable in the minds of certain thinkers, it has to remain as an opinion formed from the idea that Lyotard's views have theological implications.

I referred to David Jasper's allusion to Kant's essay, 'What is the Enlightenment?', in which Jasper questions the Western attitude to the much esteemed idea of reason found in Kant's thought, which occupies the central ground. For Jasper the experience of gazing at modern works of art, such as those of Mark Rothko, can cause one to enter a state of contemplation leading to a merging of the infinite and the sublime. Jasper sees the work of Jackson Pollock, Rothko, and Barnett Newman as moving away from enlightenment thinking towards the wholly other, as he states, 'we become wholly ourselves only in the wholly other'.<sup>704</sup>

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<sup>702</sup> Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 56. Parenthesis entered as in the text.

<sup>703</sup> Lyotard, *The Post Modern Condition*, p. 8.

<sup>704</sup> Jasper, *The Sacred Desert*, p. 122.

## Chapter Six

### The Sublime and the Numinous in Contemporary Thought

My previous chapters have referred briefly to contemporary thinkers on the concepts of the sublime and the numinous. In this chapter, I will explore more fully the findings of recent thinkers in order to discover ways in which the numinous and the sublime have been understood, and to ascertain whether there is a relationship between the two. I will also seek to shed fresh light on these ideas. Recent works, particularly those by Timothy Costelloe, Robert Doran, and Emily Brady, have focused on the sublime, arguing in some cases for its relevance and in others for its annihilation. While the sublime generally emerges as a secular concept, the numinous, initiated by Otto's argument for a non-rational God, seeks its place within the realms of religion and the ineffable. Yet the sublime may also be described as ineffable, as I explained in Chapter Two of this thesis when I discussed Christine Riding's description of the sublime and her conclusion that 'words fail us'. In this chapter, I will also consider the arguments produced following a conference in 2014 on Rudolf Otto, entitled 'The Holy in a Pluralistic World: Rudolf Otto's Legacy in the Twenty-First Century'.

Apart from my consideration of Otto and his influence today, a pertinent question for this chapter will be whether or not the sublime and the religious can be brought together. I will now go on to examine an argument put forward by Andrew Chignell and Matthew Halteman in Costelloe's *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, in which the authors call for some attention to be paid to providing a theological template for 'the whole' rather than simply focusing on a particular era or individual writers.<sup>705</sup> They list, among others, David B. Morris who, in his *The Religious Sublime*, focuses on eighteenth-century England.<sup>706</sup> A further example of a narrow focus appears in Jan Rosiek's

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<sup>705</sup> Andrew Chignell and Matthew C. Halteman, 'Religion and the Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present', in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. By Timothy M. Costelloe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 184, n. 4.

<sup>706</sup> David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972).

*Maintaining the Sublime: Heidegger and Adorno*, which considers just two philosophers in its examination of the sublime.<sup>707</sup>

Chignell and Halteman's argument speaks of bringing the sublime and the religious together and I will provide an account of their argument below.<sup>708</sup> While this is an important and challenging idea, it is worth asking whether such a union is possible or even desirable. Why, for instance, would anyone who is convinced that God does not exist, as understood in their own experience, wish to attribute the sensations of sublime moments to religious experience? While 'religious experience' evokes a sense of experience of God, it can occur without any divine intervention. For instance, observers of religious customs experience religion but do not necessarily experience God. Further, and based on Chignell and Halteman's argument, why would anyone who is convinced of the relevance of religious faith and of the existence of a deity wish to consider that the numinous is anything but the entrance of the holiness of the numen into human life?<sup>709</sup> One reason for wanting to bring about an alliance between the numinous and the sublime is, in spite of personal opinions, because there seem to be so many valid points of contact between the two and therefore the evidence invites some explanation. I will examine the points of contact between the two concepts later in this chapter. Some consideration must also be given to the subjective stance and, as Otto and others have said, to the type of mindset that is conducive to recognising sublimity and the numinous.<sup>710</sup> However, although the language used by eighteenth-century theorists to describe their experiences of the sublime is not dissimilar to that used to describe the numinous, we are still dealing with two different concepts: the seeming secularity of the sublime and the religious connotations associated with the numinous.

Chignell and Halteman attempt an examination of the relations between the sublime and the religious. Like many other commentators, the difficulty they find in communicating the meaning of the sublime lies in the ineffability of the concept. For example, if a person has a sublime experience it would be impossible to describe it

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<sup>707</sup> Jan Rosiek, *Maintaining the Sublime: Heidegger and Adorno* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000).

<sup>708</sup> Chignell and Halteman, 'Religion and the Sublime', p. 184.

<sup>709</sup> For more on the numen, see Chapter Five.

<sup>710</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.

accurately. Chignell and Halteman turn to Kant for some affirmation of their beliefs and quote his conclusion that certain sights in nature are an ‘abyss’ for the imagination, ‘in which it fears to lose itself’, and when encountered can even do ‘violence to [the] inner sense’.<sup>711</sup> Later in this chapter I will consider in more detail the idea of passive violence in both the sublime and the numinous. For the present, however, I shall examine the three stages of the sublime that may be thought of as religious, as identified by Chignell and Halteman.

The first stage is what Chignell and Halteman call ‘bedazzlement’, which they define as an astonishing encounter with the forces of nature. This leads to the second stage, which lies in ‘outstripping’, and ultimately the third stage, or ‘epiphany’. The bedazzlement stage involves a sense of terror and of being mesmerised, leading to a sense of the subject’s linguistic and conceptual faculties being transcended.<sup>712</sup> Although the initial fright may fade away, the subject is still left with a sense of ‘outstripping’, which is more precisely defined in German as *das Erhabene*, meaning in a literal sense ‘the elevating’, or what we have come to know as the sublime.<sup>713</sup> As an example of ‘outstripping’, Chignell and Halteman turn to Milton’s depiction of death in *Paradise Lost* Book 2, lines 666-73, where ‘Death’ moves beyond normal patterns encountered and is presented poetically as that which is ‘fierce as ten furies; terrible as hell’.<sup>714</sup> The example given by Chignell and Haltemann is used by Burke as an invocation of the sublime. He refers to Milton’s description of Death, which he calls ‘the portrait of the king of terrors’.<sup>715</sup> The second stage of the sublime Chignell and Halteman define as a ‘concept-transcending stage’.<sup>716</sup> While the writers present very little evidence for this stage, one way of understanding it might be to consider it in terms of Otto’s description of the *mysterium tremendum*, which he tells us begins to ‘loom before the mind and touch the feelings’.<sup>717</sup> One might derive from this an unsettling of the psyche and a sense of going beyond the ordinary. For the third stage, Chignell and Halteman suggest an ‘epiphanic’ stage, in which

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<sup>711</sup> Chignell and Halteman, ‘Religion and the Sublime’, p. 186.

<sup>712</sup> Chignell and Halteman, ‘Religion and the Sublime’, p. 185.

<sup>713</sup> Chignell and Halteman, ‘Religion and the Sublime’, p. 185.

<sup>714</sup> Chignell and Halteman, ‘Religion and the Sublime’, p. 187.

<sup>715</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 55.

<sup>716</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 185.

<sup>717</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 15.

the association with religion becomes more precise since affections or beliefs may be changed: ‘in the epiphanic third stage [...] the religious dimension becomes more explicit and thus more accessible to philosophical analysis’.<sup>718</sup> The writers claim further that Kant sees the third stage as indicating the superiority of the mind to natural phenomena.<sup>719</sup> Chignell and Halteman find a biblical reference, the events of which bear some resemblance to what may be understood as both sublime and religious experience. They refer to the response of the Roman Centurion following the piercing of Christ’s side during his crucifixion.<sup>720</sup> The gospel writer, Matthew, records phenomenal occurrences taking place as ‘the earth shook, and the rocks were split’.<sup>721</sup> Otto links such an experience to the *mysterium tremendum*, as he states:

this feeling of consciousness of the ‘wholly other’ will attach itself to, or will sometimes be indirectly aroused by means of, objects which are already puzzling upon the ‘natural’ plane, or are of a surprising or astounding character; such as extraordinary phenomena or astonishing occurrences or things in inanimate nature.<sup>722</sup>

This ‘sensory perception of natural objects’ was witnessed by everyone present, although the Centurion is particularly highlighted since he had no leaning towards the Christian faith. The terror suffered by the Centurion, Chignell and Halteman assert, is ‘circumstantial evidence’ since he had no reason ‘to believe that the victim was divine’.<sup>723</sup> The Centurion’s overall response was to ‘worship God’.<sup>724</sup> Chignell and Halteman go on to discuss Lucas Cranach the Elder’s painting, *The Crucifixion with the Converted Centurion* (1538), which depicts the centurion at the point where he recognises Christ’s divinity and utters the words: ‘Truly, this man was the Son of God’.<sup>725</sup> For the Centurion, the encounter involved fear and astonishment, and a realisation that something outside normal experience

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<sup>718</sup> Chignell and Halteman, ‘Religion and the Sublime’, p. 187.

<sup>719</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, pp. 185-187; see also Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*, 5, pp. 244-78.

<sup>720</sup> Chignell and Halteman, ‘Religion and the Sublime’, p. 189.

<sup>721</sup> Matthew 27.51.

<sup>722</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 27.

<sup>723</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 189.

<sup>724</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 189.

<sup>725</sup> Mark 15.39.

had occurred.<sup>726</sup> Such a response is not unlike that found in Otto's description of the *mysterium tremendum*. As Otto states,

the soul, held speechless, trembles inwardly to the farthest fibre of its being. It invades the mind mightily in Christian worship with the words: 'Holy, holy, holy'; it breaks forth from the hymn of Tersteegn:

God Himself is present:

Heart be stilled before Him:

Prostrate inwardly adore Him.<sup>727</sup>

Allen W. Wood also comments on the Centurion's experience, based on his understanding of Kant, and states that fundamentally Kant's 'highest hopes for human history are pinned on religious values and religious intuitions'.<sup>728</sup> Is there a place for religion, then, in the concept of the sublime? I will now examine Doran's viewpoint in light of Kant's position in relation to the sublime and the religious.

Doran refers to Kant's account of his term 'the dynamically sublime', where he shows his awareness of the place of religion in the concept of the sublime. It is the dynamically sublime towards which Kant leans for his persuasions rather than, as Doran sees it, the seemingly more appropriate mathematically sublime. Doran suggests the reason for Kant's preference is that the traditional view of God tends to be associated with infinity and would be more in keeping with the mathematically sublime, which is concerned with scale or magnitude. Doran's theory is that Kant may have been adhering to Burke's inclination to associate terror and power with God and suggests that for that reason, Kant 'no doubt felt obliged to address it'.<sup>729</sup> While Doran cannot say for certain that Kant held that view, he still emerges, for Doran, as 'a thinker genuinely concerned with religion'.<sup>730</sup>

With Doran's proposals in mind we can turn again to Dennis, whose approach to the religious sublime I discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. Dennis refers to the wrath of

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<sup>726</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 189.

<sup>727</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 17.

<sup>728</sup> Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 318.

<sup>729</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 255.

<sup>730</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 255.

God as manifested in the sublime terror attenuated by the violence of the natural world in earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and other uncontrollable natural events. For Dennis, religious ideas were the principle source of the sublime, but it is the very being of deity that is to be feared more than other terrors of nature that may come upon humanity.<sup>731</sup> Dennis's claim regarding the being of God and the terror the divine may invoke places the deity as superior, fearsome, and unapproachable, very much in conflict with the concept of a God of love as encountered in the Christian gospels. David B. Morris, when considering Dennis's description of his thoughts and emotions as he crossed the Alps, compares Dennis's experience with the sublimity of Satan, as presented by Milton in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's description of Satan as a 'proud tower' in Book One had an effect on Addison, who declared: 'there is no single Passage in the whole Poem worked up to a greater sublimity'.<sup>732</sup> With Milton's attractive description of the arch enemy of God, there was an accompanying aesthetic pleasure which, in spite of Satan's immoral character and malevolence, still inspires admiration. On the same point, Morris refers to James Beattie's speculation 'we are often compelled to admire that very greatness by which we are confounded and terrified'.<sup>733</sup> A similar response is made by Nathan Drake, who states, 'while we gaze and tremble at the awful [*sic*] demon, we feel a thrilling sensation of pleasurable wonder, of admiration and of horror stealing through every nerve'.<sup>734</sup> Morris finds in these responses to Satan a parallel to Dennis's Alpine experiences (2.381). Here are instances of the bedazzling I spoke of earlier, of sublime encounter and a sense of being overwhelmed, which resonate with numinous experience.

The sense of being overwhelmed by an experience emerges as a consistent theme throughout the history of both the sublime and the numinous and points towards a similarity between the two. While Heath's understanding of 'astonishment' in respect of the sublime has its roots in the delight experienced by the elegance and beauty of a piece of writing, the 'astonishment' Otto would speak of in relation to the numinous involves a sense of shock and fear in the presence of that which is beyond comprehension. Referring

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<sup>731</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 255.

<sup>732</sup> Morris, *The Religious Sublime*, p. 97. Quotation from *The Spectator* 303.

<sup>733</sup> Morris, *The Religious Sublime*, p. 97.

<sup>734</sup> Nathan Drake, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 11 (1941-42), pp. 421-436. Quoted in Morris, *The Religious Sublime*, p. 97.

to the German word for ‘monstrous’, *das Ungeheuer*, Otto explains that it is not simply to do with being huge in size but has come to mean ‘the uncanny, the fearful, the dauntingly “other” and incomprehensible’.<sup>735</sup> It is this concept that I now go on to discuss in light of recent scholarship, particularly that of Melissa Raphael.

Raphael considers the popularity of *Das Heilige*, proven by its having gone through 25 editions before 1936. She quotes Heinz Zahrnt (1915-2003) who claims that the text ‘is probably the most widely read theological work in German of the twentieth century’.<sup>736</sup> I have not found any evidence for Zahrnt’s claim, but one theological work with which I would contest the statement is the German theologian Karl Barth’s (1886-1968) *Epistle to the Romans*. Barth published the work in 1919 and it still enjoys popularity today among the laity and theologians alike. Raphael, in support of Otto’s work, goes on to quote the German scholar of religion, Joachim Wach (1898-1955) who, seeking to emphasise a distinction between the history of religion and the philosophy of religion, is credited with speaking of Otto’s book as ‘one of the profoundest analyses which have ever been made to indicate the objective character, the meaning of religion’.<sup>737</sup> Otto’s book has received many accolades but one of the most important remarks is by Willard Oxtoby (1933-2003), who, as Raphael points out, calls the work ‘a landmark among theories of religion’.<sup>738</sup> A sign of its greatness, according to Oxtoby, and as Raphael shows, lies in the fact that ‘it takes account of the cumulative critical and scientific tradition of modern Europe, and claims a place of respect for religious experience and religious thought in a modern age’.<sup>739</sup> Raphael suggests that *Das Heilige* must have seemed to its early readers ‘a liberation from nineteenth-century moralism and *petit bourgeois* values’.<sup>740</sup> However, the date of the publication of *Das Heilige*, which occurred when Germany was facing defeat in the First World War, could be understood as significant in any attempt to discover why the book was received with such enthusiasm. The usual ‘civilised order and values’ that prevailed in Germany had given way to vulnerability, a dearth of spirituality, and a sense of disorientation. It was therefore a small step to take to embrace the non-rational as

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<sup>735</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 40.

<sup>736</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 73.

<sup>737</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 73.

<sup>738</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 73.

<sup>739</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>740</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 74. Italics as in original text.

presented by Otto. However, Raphael finds in the writings of the Catholic theologian F. K. Feigel, who considered the details of Otto's text, that there is a sense in which the traumatic experience of war attracted readers to Otto's work, where instead of finding God they found only the human.<sup>741</sup> I disagree with Feigel, because Otto's work was not so much a search as an exposition of what he understood to be a pre-existing phenomenon. The success of *Das Heilige* was noted by John Oman (1860-1939), the British Presbyterian theologian, who also attributed the success of the work in Germany to the effects of war. Reviewing *Das Heilige*, Oman comments that the book is 'an important document of the effect of the War in Germany', relating its success to 'economic distress and political despair'.<sup>742</sup> The people of Germany were clearly seeking some kind of spiritual affirmation, and although Otto's book involves the mystical to some extent, it is still both a religious and philosophical work. The text challenges given norms, and without attempting evangelisation is able to give an explanation of certain types of human experience. Otto's thinking suggests the transcendent, that which lies beyond life as it is, which may have brought some satisfaction to the German people who were open to new ways of thinking following the First World War. As Raphael states:

For them, culture was in crisis, because it had come to doubt its own past and future. Moral and intellectual values were being undermined in the realisation that rationality and progress were a fiction; that in the unconscious and at the heart of civilisation there was a dark void.<sup>743</sup>

With the predominance of such feelings in human consciousness, it could be argued that this encouraged people to evade or avoid material reality. The 'dark void' itself carried some attraction for the German people, who sought answers in the midst of uncertainty, disorientation, and the aftermath of war. Feigel's criticism was rooted in what he saw as the failure of *Das Heilige* to present an adequate theology, and he accused Otto of adding to the nation's spiritual disorientations rather than assuaging them.<sup>744</sup> Was Feigel saying that there is something daemonic in the numinous? Otto refers to Johann Peter Eckermann's

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<sup>741</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>742</sup> John Oman, 'Review of *The Idea of the Holy*', *Journal of Religious Studies*, 25 (1924), p. 275; quoted in Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 75.

<sup>743</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 75.

<sup>744</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 75.

*Conversations with Goethe* in respect of the daemonic. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) spoke of 'daemonic' qualities found in strong characters, for example Napoleon. Indeed, Otto does refer to the daemonic as having 'an import of "energy"'.<sup>745</sup> He attempts to explain the dichotomy between the purity of the deity and the daemonic side of the numen. In Otto's consideration of Goethe's meaning of daemonic, in the latter's conversation with Eckermann, he states: 'The daemonic is that which cannot be accounted for by understanding and reason. It chooses for itself obscure times of darkness'.<sup>746</sup> Goethe's description of the daemonic is not unlike Otto's attempts to articulate the numinous, since Goethe sees the daemonic as that which transcends any attempt at apprehension, finding it to be beyond 'conceiving', surpassing both 'understanding' and 'reason' and being quite 'inapprehensible'. All of these descriptions find resonance with Otto's idea of the numinous. At the same time, however, while Otto is making a case for a non-rational God, which could be understood as a source of energy imparting itself to those who are able to receive it, Goethe manifests this energy in men who are strong and powerful, as I will go on to demonstrate with Eckermann's report of a conversation between Goethe and Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821).

As Eckermann reports of their conversation about Napoleon, 'Napoleon, said I, seems to have been a daemonic sort of man'.<sup>747</sup> Goethe asserted that Napoleon 'was so absolutely and to such a degree [daemonic] that hardly any other man can be compared with him in this respect'.<sup>748</sup> Can such men, then, who are empowered and possess a numinosity, be called holy? My discussion in Chapter One dealt with the conception of the holy and the profane and I discussed Mircea Eliade's conception of these phenomena. The holy can be experienced as fearful and at the same time fascinating, while the profane can be anything that is not holy, in other words the ordinary in everyday life. While Eliade attempted to discern between the two phenomena, he did not raise the question of the daemonic when facing the challenge of deity and he did not sort out the dichotomy between the two. As I have explained, Goethe used the term daemonic to specify the characters of certain men in history, especially Napoleon. The greatness and power that Napoleon

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<sup>745</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 151.

<sup>746</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 150.

<sup>747</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 152.

<sup>748</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 152.

possessed, Goethe referred to as daemonic. The use of the word daemonic has connotations with words to do with Satan, for example diabolical, so here we are finding a closer relationship with what is understood as evil. The Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) spoke of daemons as capable of possessing a subject: ‘Wherein the daemonic element that lurks in all human things, may doubtless, some once in the thousand years – get vent’!<sup>749</sup> Such a suggestion is reminiscent of the power of the numinous, as demonstrated by Otto. Can we discern from Carlyle’s words that the numinous lies dormant in all human beings and is thus awaiting the right moment to be activated, rather than an experience that comes from outside the subject? For Otto it is important to be able to recognise and discern the numinous and it is that ‘divination’ that he attributes to Goethe, as he states:

The daemonic character appears in its most dreadful form when it stands out dominatingly in some man. Such are not always the most remarkable men, either in spiritual quality or natural talents, and they seldom have any goodness of heart to recommend them. But an incredible force goes forth from them and they exercise an incredible power over all creatures, nay perhaps even over the elements. And who can say how far such an influence may not extend.<sup>750</sup>

Raphael finds that Otto glorifies the ‘numinous energy and *tremendum*’, which finds a place in ‘men of vehement and over-powering personality’.<sup>751</sup> Raphael takes Otto’s thinking to the extreme, calling such characters ‘the Hitlers of this world’.<sup>752</sup> Such findings seem to be a long way from ideas of the holy. Can the numinous, then, be understood as being possessed of both good and evil? Kant, as I discussed in Chapter Three, called for a respect for the moral law and made a connection between a sublimity of mind and the moral. Is the noble or sublime soul necessarily moral? From my earlier discussion on Napoleon, I would conclude that it is not. Otto makes a claim for the numinous as being inherent in the personalities of great men and, if Raphael is to be believed, even despots. The question that Otto’s claim raises is whether the idea of the numinous, as found in the

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<sup>749</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, Book 1, Paper 11, The Paper Age, Ebook #1301, Project Gutenberg, [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org); Accessed 23-06-2017.

<sup>750</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 152-3.

<sup>751</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 77.

<sup>752</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 77.

deity whom one may imagine to be a god of love, can be associated with the inspiration and overwhelming power that is linked with the despotic.

Dichotomies continue to appear in Otto's thinking and suggest that the numinous is not only to do with that which is virtuous but can also be found in that which is evil. Raphael, who comes from a Jewish background, attempts to bear this out and relates the conclusion reached by Tom Driver, who visited Hiroshima: 'I had the feeling at Hiroshima that the place was holy not in spite of but because something unspeakably bad had happened there'.<sup>753</sup> Here is a confirmation of the mysteriousness evoked by a sense of holiness, discerned through circumstances that are *in extremis* and by their nature infer numinosity, which becomes a point of contact with the divine. A further question arises as to the nature of God, which is what Otto is exploring. The God who emerges is one who continues to be unknowable and inconceivable, mysterious and awe inspiring. All these thoughts begin to make more sense when considered in the light of the rational and non-rational of a divine being, as I explored in Chapter One of this work. As Raphael goes on to state:

When awe overwhelms reverence all that seems to remain is Kierkegaardian 'fear and trembling': submission to the intoxicating terror of absolute divine might. It is, I think, a fair reading of *The Idea of the Holy* [*Das Heilige*] to suppose that the idea of a good and rational Father-God is merely a symbol or outer casing for a reality whose innermost being is a numinous *energicum*; a pre-Judaic power.<sup>754</sup>

Raphael's comment asks a serious question about our received and traditional understanding of the divine. The phrase 'pre-Judaic power' indicates a pre-existing energy capable of inspiring a sense of the numinous. Commentators who have wrestled with Otto's stance on the idea of holiness, as Raphael shows, have found that it reveals a God who is 'deficient in divine love and over-weighted with that of fear'.<sup>755</sup>

Raphael also uses a feminist theological approach in her essay, 'Gender, Idolatry and Numinous Experience'. Here she finds, in traditional and contemporary Judaic

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<sup>753</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, pp. 77-8.

<sup>754</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 78.

<sup>755</sup> Raphael, *Rudolf Otto and the Concept of Holiness*, p. 80.

Orthodoxy, no place for a feminine experience of the numinous. The role of a Jewish woman is confined to domesticity and maintaining purity within the family. As Raphael states, ‘Theirs is an experience of non-numinous, mundane holiness that bears no aesthetic relation to what Otto calls the “grisly horror and shuddering” of the prostrated soul’.<sup>756</sup> However, Raphael claims for herself a numinous experience:

It is not that women are in any sense incapable of having a numinous experience or that they do not have the spiritual range and register to be aesthetically moved by the *mysterium tremendum* (after all, as a young woman I knew perfectly well what Otto was referring to). It is rather that Otto’s account of phenomenology mistakes a masculine and historically conditioned account of the numinous for a universal and unconditioned one.<sup>757</sup>

Although Raphael gives no indication of the nature of what she understood to be her numinous experience, she nevertheless claims it as a genuine encounter and into that claim brings the possibility of numinous encounters for all women. Whether this is something that would be acknowledged by Jewish men is debateable, since women are deemed to be associated with flesh (*gashmiut*) while the nature of men is aligned with spirit (*ruhniut*). Raphael argues that Otto mistakenly narrows the horizons of the numinous, limiting the experience to men, since Otto constantly uses the masculine personal pronoun, and also refers to male theologians in his work. Raphael has made an important point, since although Otto makes no specific attempt to exclude women from his argument it must be acknowledged that he makes no overt attempt to include them. However, one can imagine that for Otto there is no need to differentiate between male and female in terms of the numinous. Women as well as men hear scripture and Christian preaching, as he states:

The *tremendum*, the daunting and repelling moment of the numinous, is schematised by means of the rational ideas of justice, moral will and the exclusion

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<sup>756</sup> Melissa Raphael, ‘Gender, Idolatry and Numinous Experience: A Feminist Theological Approach to Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*’, p. 250. This article is, as yet, unpublished. It was sent to me by Melissa Raphael.

<sup>757</sup> Raphael, ‘Gender, Idolatry and Numinous Experience’, p. 252.

of what is opposed to morality; and schematised thus, it becomes the holy ‘wrath of God’, which scripture and Christian preaching alike proclaim.<sup>758</sup>

Judaism, whose creation story includes the Fall, depicts a numinous moment for both Adam and Eve. Both face the wrath of God and a moment of *tremendum* as they hear the following words, addressed to Eve, questioning their disobedience: ‘What is this that you have done?’<sup>759</sup> I would argue that if the *tremendum* is understood as the ‘wrath of God’ then it does not differentiate between male and female but is distributed where necessary to both. A further example of the ‘wrath of God’, directed towards both male and female, occurs in the New Testament. Two of the early Christians, Ananias and Sapphira, attempting to deceive fellow Christians in the early church, fall down dead. Their seeming punishment leads to a general sense of fear among the new followers of Christ, and the writer of the Acts of the Apostles states, ‘the whole church and all the others who heard of this were terrified’.<sup>760</sup> The terrifying nature of the numinous, as articulated by Otto, was present in history as I have shown in my examples. I shall now examine the work of recent essayists who have sought to articulate what Otto’s legacy might be in the twenty-first century.

### **Contemporary thought and the numinous**

At a conference in November 2014, a group of academics met at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to present papers on Otto and to discuss his legacy in the twenty-first century.<sup>761</sup> Amongst them was Robert Orsi, who has stated ‘the revival of interest in Rudolf Otto and the holy is one of the great improbabilities of contemporary scholarship in religion’.<sup>762</sup> For the purpose of my thesis, I will consider the contribution of Jörg Lauster’s

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<sup>758</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 140.

<sup>759</sup> Genesis 3.13.

<sup>760</sup> Acts 5. 1-11.

<sup>761</sup> ‘The Holy in a Pluralistic World: Rudolf Otto’s Legacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’, November 5-6, 2014, University of Wisconsin-Madison. The conference was collaboratively organised by Prof. Gregory Alles, (McDaniel College) and Rev. Dr Ulrich Rosenhagen (University of Wisconsin-Madison).  
<http://www.sociologyofreligion.com>

<sup>762</sup> Prof. Robert Orsi, ‘The Problem of the Holy in a World of Religious Pluralism’, paper presented at ‘The Holy in a Pluralistic World: Rudolf Otto’s Legacy in the Twenty-First Century’, 5-7 November 2014, Pyle Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

paper, entitled ‘Why the Work of Rudolf Otto Continues to Matter in Theology and the Study of Religion’. Lauster refers to Otto as ‘a virtuoso of the nineteenth and early twentieth century’.<sup>763</sup> Picking up on Schleiermacher’s use of the concept of the Virtuoso in his *Speeches on Religion*, Lauster presents the accolade to Otto, stating:

Like the musical virtuoso the religious virtuoso is an extraordinary expert, but in a different manner. Extraordinary is his gift to have a special feeling for the transcendent dimension of the world; extraordinary is the capacity to express this feeling in words, gestures, and acts.<sup>764</sup>

For Lauster, Otto embodied the two gifts of being able to understand his time and its challenges and having the ability to articulate his insights. Otto recognised that one of the challenges of his time was political unrest, particularly experienced by university professors (of which he was one) who were deprived of their posts. Otto’s efforts to find new ways to approach the difficulties facing religious life are what make him interesting for us today. For Lauster, it was not Otto’s intention to allow religion to become a higher form of morality. Lauster’s sentiments regarding religion and morality reflect the discussion in Chapter Two of my thesis, in which I examined the differences Otto found between that which is holy and that which is moral. I agreed with Otto that the concept of the holy is done a disservice when it is understood as emerging from the moral, as it is totally distinct from the moral. Otto argues that while different schools of thought may make some contribution to the understanding of religion, none of them comprehends the whole, and this is attested and commended by Lauster. The latter adds a recommendation that those who truly admire Otto must ‘think about a theory of religious position’. When Otto defined his own religious position, he said: ‘My position is that of a modernistic pietistic Lutheran with some inclination to the Quakers’.<sup>765</sup> Otto was claiming for himself a reflective type of Christianity, which would be in line with his depth of feeling that resulted in his own numinous experience. Lauster makes a pivotal point when he refers to Otto’s theory of

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<sup>763</sup> Jorg Lauster, ‘Why the Work of Rudolf Otto Continues to Matter in Theology and the Study of Religion’, Lubar Institute, Madison, 5. November 2014, p. 1.

<sup>764</sup> Lauster, ‘Why the Work of Rudolf Otto Continues to Matter’, p. 1.

<sup>765</sup> Rudolf Otto, Letter to Wilhelm Hauer/23.5.1933/BA, quoted in Jorg Lauster, ‘Why the Work of Rudolf Otto Continues to Matter’, p. 3.

religious experience, which he calls ‘a breaking-through-experience’.<sup>766</sup> Here we find the kernel of Otto’s thinking, as Lauster states: ‘The framework of daily life is in some meaningful sense *transcended*, there is a movement from the mundane to a higher dimension’.<sup>767</sup> For the sublime also, there is a movement from the mundane to a higher dimension, as I have argued in Chapter Five. While Lauster’s insights do not pay attention to the sublime, they get to the heart of Otto’s theory of the numinous, which, he states, compel the people who have them to ‘use the category of transcendence and holiness in their expression of their experience’.<sup>768</sup> Such a suggestion implies that the subject of the experience is able to articulate a response when in reality it may be impossible to articulate an experience of the transcendent or of the sublime, for that matter.

Costelloe, for example, acknowledges that the concept of the sublime has gone through a period of unpopularity where it has variously been called ‘anaemic, bourgeois, elitist, feeble [...] and weak’, among other adjectives.<sup>769</sup> The fundamental problem leading to the unpopularity of the sublime, Costelloe finds, lies in ‘an inadequacy in the *philosophical concept* of the Sublime’ and not as any signal for ‘the disappearance of the *human experience* to which the concept refers or in some way delineates’.<sup>770</sup> For Costelloe, then, the sublime retains its place as a human experience and therefore he supports Longinus’s thinking and that of the eighteenth-century theorists. The fact that the sublime has changed in the succeeding centuries since it was first spoken of in Longinus’s writings, and that it has come in for some criticism, leads Costelloe to take up the challenging question set by the historian James Elkins that calls for a new ‘once and for all’ definition of the sublime.<sup>771</sup> I will now consider Elkins’s challenge to the sublime.

### **A challenge to the concept of the sublime**

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<sup>766</sup> Lauster, ‘Why the Work of Rudolf Otto Continues to Matter’, p. 3.

<sup>767</sup> Lauster, ‘Why the Work of Rudolf Otto Continues to Matter’, p. 3.

<sup>768</sup> Lauster, ‘Why the Work of Rudolf Otto Continues to Matter’, pp. 3-4.

<sup>769</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p.1.

<sup>770</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 1.

<sup>771</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 1.

In his article ‘Against the Sublime’, Elkins takes a strong line in opposition to the concept, to the extent that his writing betrays his intention to attempt an annihilation of the sublime. Apart from the adjectives mentioned earlier, he complains of the weakness of the idea and the fact that it has caused scholars such as himself to ‘focus on images of things that are incomprehensively vast, or unimaginably small, or frighteningly blank, dark, blurred, pixilated or otherwise inadequate to the objects they mean to represent’.<sup>772</sup> His argument suggests that he finds it challenging to try to cope with the vastness of the concept and so for his own sake he would prefer to see it abandoned. However, he unwaveringly enlists the support of the philosopher Richard Rorty, whom he claims accuses the sublime of being ‘one of the prettier unforced blue flowers of bourgeois culture’ and ‘wildly irrelevant’.<sup>773</sup> Under a section entitled ‘Why the sublime is a religious concept’, Elkins states, ‘In past centuries some of the ideas now contested under the name “sublime” were known more directly as religious truth or revelation. Today writers in the humanities mostly shy away from open talk about religion’.<sup>774</sup> This sentence has some truth in it, since even though the reader may have some inclination towards religious faith, it is hard to present tangible evidence when dealing with religious experience, and this makes it all the more challenging. However, and on the contrary, Elkins’s argument seems, adversely, to make a case for an association of the sublime with religion. The historicity of the concept of the sublime is highlighted along with its relationship to the realm of religion. As Elkins states, ‘this permeable veil between two kinds of thinking has always been a trait of the sublime’.<sup>775</sup> These thoughts encourage research into the relationship between the secular sublime and religious concepts.

Katrina Deligiorgi, in her article ‘The Pleasures of Contra-Purposiveness: Kant, the Sublime, and Being Human’, seeks an answer that challenges negative questions related to the doubts that have been raised in recent scholarship in relation to the sublime. Deligiorgi’s position is rooted in Kant’s examination of aesthetic judgement in the *Critique*

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<sup>772</sup> James Elkins, ‘Against the Sublime’, p. 2. This article was originally published in *Beyond the Finite: The Sublime in Art and Science*, edited by Roald Hoffman and Iain Boyd Whyte (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 20-42. Now available at [www.jameselkins.com](http://www.jameselkins.com)

<sup>773</sup> Elkins, ‘Against the Sublime’, p. 22.

<sup>774</sup> Elkins, ‘Against the Sublime’, p. 12.

<sup>775</sup> Elkins, ‘Against the Sublime’, p. 14.

of the *Power of Judgement*. She asks, ‘Is a coherent theory of the sublime possible? Is the sublime a useful concept? Is the chief interest in the sublime moral?’<sup>776</sup> To the first two questions Deligiorgi replies a resounding ‘yes’, and the latter receives an inflexible ‘no’. The argument pursues the claim that ‘a coherent theory of the sublime is possible and useful, and the experience of the sublime is significant for our self-conception as agents’.<sup>777</sup> Her argument goes on to maintain that an interest in the sublime does not spring from morality. She considers the arguments for a theory of the sublime put forward by Jane Forsey, Melissa Merritt, and Robert Clewis and informed by Kant’s ethics. Her argument also includes consideration of Elkins who, as I have discussed, comes out strongly against the effectiveness or usefulness of the sublime. Forsey, in favour of a theory of the sublime, argues against and builds on Guy Sircello’s claim that such a theory is not possible and his contention that contemporary theories of the sublime are not only incoherent but also contradictory. Sircello is also attempting to deprive the sublime of any claim to transcendence since, in his opinion, it is attached to a non-existent object.<sup>778</sup> Deligiorgi also presents Merritt’s theory of the sublime, which the former understands as making a contribution to the argument that the sublime has moral aims. As Merritt states, the sublime ‘contributes to the reflective work of critical philosophy by illuminating the moral psychology of the *rational animal*’.<sup>779</sup> Further support for the sublime as a moral agent derives from the work of Robert Clewis, who argues in favour of sublimity’s moral place and states that it is ‘predicated properly not on an objective property but on an idea of reason and especially a moral one’.<sup>780</sup> Clewis’s argument relates to my earlier discussion on religion and morality, as he attempts to put forward a specific category related to the ‘moral sublime’ that is based on Kant’s theory. Deligiorgi concludes that the concept of the sublime in the thinking of both Merritt and Clewis is rooted in Kant’s ethics, and they ‘define it through an inward turn, as a state of mind or feeling’.<sup>781</sup> Such a definition finds

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<sup>776</sup> Katerina Deligiorgi, ‘The Pleasures of Contra-Purposiveness: Kant, the Sublime, and Being Human’, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 72, 1 (Winter 2014), p. 2; The American Society for Aesthetics. [www.library.wiley.com/doi/1111/jaac.12060/full](http://www.library.wiley.com/doi/1111/jaac.12060/full); Accessed: 29/04/2016.

<sup>777</sup> Deligiorgi, ‘The Pleasures of Contra-Purposiveness’, p. 2.

<sup>778</sup> Guy Sircello, ‘How Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?’, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 541-50 (p.544). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/431887>; accessed 05/01/2012.

<sup>779</sup> Deligiorgi, ‘The Pleasures of Contra-Purposiveness’, p. 5.

<sup>780</sup> Robert Clewis, quoted in Deligiorgi, ‘The Pleasures of Contra-Purposiveness’, p. 5.

<sup>781</sup> Deligiorgi, ‘The Pleasures of Contra-Purposiveness’, p. 5.

resonance with a traditional understanding of sublime experience. However, it still leaves the sublime as a purely secular experience which, it can be argued, it is not, since it bears some of the characteristics of religious experience (e.g., it evokes a sense of awe). The sense of awe and dread inspired by the sublime is one of the similarities apparent in the concepts of the sublime and the numinous.

While the ‘inward turn’ of which Merritt and Clewis speak can have theoretical advantages, due to having a specific point of reference, theories that concern themselves with the ‘ungraspable object’ present different challenges and pressures. This is the case also with the numinous, since the concept certainly deals with that which is ungraspable and ineffable. Deligiorgi shows that the ‘inward turn’ is not necessarily advantageous since the sublime can be side-lined in favour of ‘specific feelings, sentiments, emotions and mental states’.<sup>782</sup> For Clewis, enthusiasm ‘of the morally correct sort’ is primary, and if we choose to call the experience ‘sublime’ that is not of any serious concern.<sup>783</sup> However, the sublime is in danger of being submerged into ethics if this path is pursued, as Deligiorgi points out: ‘the question remains whether the sublime, in its Kantian interpretation, has independent claims on our attention and a distinctively aesthetic application’.<sup>784</sup> There is, then, an overarching question as to whether the sublime is to do with morals or to do with aesthetics. Deligiorgi concludes that it is distinctly to do with aesthetics.

Costelloe highlights the difficulty faced when trying to make sense of the relationship between experience and any attempt to ‘grasp, explain, and express it [the sublime] in philosophical terms’.<sup>785</sup> He argues that the challenge lies in striving to articulate that which is beyond our grasp, out of our reach, or transcendent. Costelloe turns to Hegel’s metaphor of ‘Minerva’s Owl’ in order to defend the continuing veracity of the sublime. The example serves to illustrate the way in which philosophy is slow to engage with subjects but eventually comes ‘swooping’ in, which represents particular concepts that may have been ignored or despised at first but that become attractive to philosophers. For Costelloe, Hegel’s metaphor emphasises the distance between the experience and the

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<sup>782</sup> Deligiorgi, ‘The Pleasures of Contra-Purposiveness’, p. 6.

<sup>783</sup> Robert Clewis, quoted in, Deligiorgi, ‘The Pleasures of Contra-Purposiveness’, p. 7.

<sup>784</sup> Deligiorgi, ‘The Pleasures of Contra-Purposiveness’, p. 26.

<sup>785</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 1.

philosophical concept.<sup>786</sup> The same is true of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum*, which arise from experience and yet demand a theoretical explanation, such as Otto attempts.

However, to return to the sublime, the question has been asked as to whether a coherent theory of it is possible. One attempt to answer this is made by Guy Sircello, who admits to having ‘a certain view of what a theory of the sublime can and should offer’.<sup>787</sup> He goes on to distinguish between the earlier subject matter that Longinus presented, i.e. a style of writing, and the effects that this produced in readers and the development of the concept in the early nineteenth century. The new development saw poets and philosophers recognising the sublime in nature and objects.<sup>788</sup> Sircello speaks of ‘*sublime experiences*’, ‘*sublime discourse*’, and ‘*talk about the sublime*’. He identifies sublime discourse as language used to describe sublime experience and cites as examples Wordsworth’s ‘vision’ on Mount Snowdon<sup>789</sup> and Shelley’s poem ‘Mont Blanc’ (1817).<sup>790</sup> Sircello’s reference to ‘talk about the sublime’ is explained as ‘reflective or analytic discourse that takes as its subject matter, primarily, sublime experience or sublime discourse’.<sup>791</sup> In this last division he includes Burke’s theory of the sublime and Kant’s ‘Analytic of the Sublime’, both of which I referred to earlier in my discussion on sublime experience.

Sircello goes on to introduce the phrase *epistemological transcendence*, which is the idea that humankind can participate in collective forms of knowing, such as the collective unconscious, group mind phenomena, and shared consciousness with a deity. On this subject, Sircello states ‘human mental powers in general are revealed (in the experience of moment) to have radically limited access [...] to what I’ll call “reality”’.<sup>792</sup> What, though, can Sircello mean by ‘reality’? If he means certainty, facts, or truth then it could increase the obscurity into which the idea of epistemological transcendence may lead in terms of the

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<sup>786</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 1.

<sup>787</sup> Sircello, ‘How is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?’, p. 1.

<sup>788</sup> Sircello, ‘How is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?’, p. 541.

<sup>789</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1979), Book Thirteenth, lines: 1-80, pp. 459-62.

<sup>790</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘Mont Blanc’, published 1817 as part of *History of a Six Weeks’ Tour through a part of France, Switzerland, Germany and Holland*. A joint venture with Mary Shelley.

<sup>791</sup> Sircello, ‘How is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?’, p. 542.

<sup>792</sup> Sircello, ‘How is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?’, p. 543. Parentheses in original text.

sublime. However, his reference to ‘human mental powers’ that have ‘radically limited access’ to reality bears some relation to Burke’s thinking on the sublime, which finds the mind overwhelmed and faced by ‘the strongest emotion it is capable of feeling’.<sup>793</sup> Sircello attempts to clarify his ideas by explaining that ‘sublime experience represents something as existing that is inaccessible to the epistemological powers of human beings, something [...] which transcends that of humankind and all of humankind’s possible environments, natural and cultural’.<sup>794</sup> This would suggest that experience of the sublime emanates from the realms of the transcendent, and this may be compared with Otto’s idea of the numinous. However, Jane Forsey hotly contests Sircello’s position.

Forsey directs us to the starting point of Sircello’s argument where he speaks of ‘the generally accepted notion that sublime experience professes to “see” beyond human powers of knowledge and description and that because of this it is inaccessible to rational thought’.<sup>795</sup> She concedes that ‘to be made aware of our cognitive capacities is at the same time to transcend them insofar as we reflect on them’, but disapproves of Sircello’s failure to explain, when speaking of an experience of an *object* of the sublime, what the object might be.<sup>796</sup> Another contention is Sircello’s notion of reality, which Forsey refers to as ‘at large’ and other ‘contradictions’ and ‘incoherencies’. However, in her reflections on Kant’s discussion of the sublime, Forsey finds that, unlike Sircello, he does not claim ‘that we have direct sensory experience of a transcendent object’ and so she finds Kant’s account ‘as the only way to generate a theory of the sublime’.<sup>797</sup>

The critic and theologian John Milbank has attempted to show that the concept of the sublime in Longinus’s *Peri Hypsous* made a significant shift from its position, as that which had previously dominated aesthetic theory, and moved towards a notion of transcendence.<sup>798</sup> Transcendence can be understood as that which goes beyond and surpasses the ordinary or physical level and exists apart from, and not subject to, the limitations of the material universe. This has relevance for my work in terms of finding the

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<sup>793</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p.36.

<sup>794</sup> Sircello, ‘How is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?’, p. 546.

<sup>795</sup> Jane Forsey, ‘Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?’, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Autumn 2007), p. 381.

<sup>796</sup> Forsey, ‘Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?’, p. 382.

<sup>797</sup> Forsey, ‘Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?’, p. 385.

<sup>798</sup> Milbank, ‘Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent’, p. 211.

relations between the sublime and the numinous. Milbank refers to Longinus's use of the biblical words from Genesis, Chapter 1 v.3 ('Let there be light and there was light'), as the latter cited them as 'sublime or elevated utterance', having some relation to classical rhetoric.<sup>799</sup> Milbank brings together the concept of the sublime and the 'transcendent [...] unrepresentable creator God' and argues that whereas the sublime God was once the epitome of harmony and value, such eminence has now been replaced in modern and postmodern thinking by a substitution of sublimity for transcendence, leaving the transcendent to occupy the realm of the unknown.<sup>800</sup> Milbank's argument highlights the difficulty intrinsic in any attempt to speak of, or try to represent, the wholly other, and make sense of numinous or transcendent encounters, as my references in Chapter Five to the experiences of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah show. Milbank suggests that there has been some neglect and rejection of the transcendent and a turning towards the idea of immanence, which means a self-sufficiency of the finite world and eventually a re-conceptualisation, as he argues:

What was the nature of the re-conceptualisation? At its heart lay a new thinking of the transcendent as the absolutely unknowable void, upon whose brink we finite beings must dizzily hover, as opposed to an older notion of a supra-hierarchical summit which we may gradually hope to scale.<sup>801</sup>

Milbank goes on to argue that there has been a usurping of the transcendent by the presence of the sublime, since the sublime was used to 're-articulate the conception of "divine height" of the most ultimate and primal reality imaginable'.<sup>802</sup> In his work *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank speaks of 'original violence', which is associated with a primal chaos. He claims that:

Antique thought and politics assumes some naturally given element of chaotic conflict which must be tamed by the stability and self-identity of reason. Modern thought assumes that there is only this chaos. Modern thought and politics (most

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<sup>799</sup> Milbank, 'Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent', p. 211.

<sup>800</sup> Milbank, 'Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent', p. 213.

<sup>801</sup> Milbank, 'Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent', p. 211.

<sup>802</sup> Milbank, 'Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent', p. 211.

clearly articulated by Nietzsche) assumes that there is only this *chaos* which cannot be tamed by an opposing transcendent principle.<sup>803</sup>

Milbank disaffiliates violence from Christianity, claiming that Christianity ‘recognises no original violence’ but ‘construes the infinite not as chaos, but as a harmonic peace which is yet beyond the circumscribing power of any totalising reason’.<sup>804</sup> While it may be argued that the person of Jesus Christ was totally non-violent, he yet suffered crucifixion. The cross has become the symbol of Christianity, recognised as the means by which violence and death are overcome. However, although the teachings of Jesus Christ mainly profess passivism, history proves quite the opposite in the universal outworking of the Christian faith. For example, the Catholic and Protestant Reformations resulted in violence spreading across Europe from the 1500s until the end of the Thirty Years War in 1648. Crockett states, ‘violence may threaten Christianity from the inside, as well as result from its practical enforcement’.<sup>805</sup> What, though, can be said about violence that differs from physical violence, the violence that deeply disturbs the psyche and demands some explanation? The descriptions of the sublime, presented by the eighteenth-century theorists discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, are concerned with the effects of the sublime on the mind. Words such as ‘fear’, ‘dread’, and ‘terror’ are used to emphasise the experience of the sublime. The subject is no less a victim of violence for the lack of physical injury but feels within the self a passive violence that affects the spirit without showing, apart from the passing sensation of ‘trembling’, any enduring outward mark. The prophet Isaiah, experiencing his vision in the Temple, could not be said to have suffered any physical violence and yet his experience was such that it completely overwhelmed his spirit by throwing him into a state of despair.<sup>806</sup>

The experiences of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum*, according to Otto, also overwhelm the spirit and lead the subject to a sense of fear and terror. As Otto states, ‘The awe or dread may indeed be so overwhelming that it seems to penetrate to the very marrow,

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<sup>803</sup> John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 5.

<sup>804</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p. 5.

<sup>805</sup> Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime*, pp. 24-26.

<sup>806</sup> Isaiah 6. 1-6.

making the man's hair bristle and his limbs quake'.<sup>807</sup> The resultant violence to the spirit that Otto describes is not heralded by any warning but can 'steal upon him almost unobserved'.<sup>808</sup> The numinous, if it bears any relationship to Christianity, has a passive violence of its own. Milbank, then, must be challenged since his thinking makes no allowance for the more subtle violence endured by the spirit, which is something Otto implies in his discussion of the numinous.<sup>809</sup> As noted a moment ago, the sublime, Milbank states, is presented by modernity and post-modernity as a substitute for transcendence.<sup>810</sup> Kierkegaard, according to Milbank, encouraged such thinking since in his definition of the sublime he spoke of it as 'aesthetic accounting' for the concept of transcendence.<sup>811</sup> Here Milbank is reading more into Kierkegaard's words than Kierkegaard may have intended, since the latter's claim is that it is not possible to 'form any idea' of God's exaltation since humanity tends to use words such as 'marvellous, the great, [and] the far reaching' to express the nature of divinity.<sup>812</sup> In other words, from Milbank's point of view, Kierkegaard, with a belief in the transcendent, sees it as not fully understood but finding recognition by merging with the less complex sublime. Milbank suggests that modernity and post-modernity shy away from the challenge presented by the idea of transcendence. The reason for this would seem to be that the sublime is easier to understand and engage with in comparison with the transcendent. Does the experience of reaching the limit of the sublime result in knowledge of the transcendent? Graham Ward considers such an experience, as I now go on to show.

Ward reflects upon John Keats's sonnet, 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', and remarks on Cortez's response to his view of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. The amazement he felt rendered him 'silent'. Here the limit of the sublime is reached and displayed in sublime feeling. It is for Ward the 'grasping of the present' that leads to an 'unlimited freedom'. It was not the sublime object, therefore, but the feeling of sublimity that imbued Cortez with silence. While many examples of what may be understood as

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<sup>807</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 16.

<sup>808</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 16.

<sup>809</sup> Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 16.

<sup>810</sup> Regina Schwartz, ed., *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 213.

<sup>811</sup> Schwartz, *Transcendence*, pp. 212-13.

<sup>812</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *The Journals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 346.

sublime feeling are recorded, the transcendent as an experience capable of verification is much more obscure. Ward claims that the sublime has a theological past and sees its development, from Burke to Lacoue Labarthe, as a journey of 'theological concerns' towards 'secular aesthetics'.<sup>813</sup> Such a suggestion consolidates the idea of the closeness of the sublime to the numinous, and its connection to the idea of transcendence. The point made by Ward emphasises the importance of trying to untangle any ongoing relationship that may exist between the two while at the same time suggesting that the sublime is an impoverished form of religious transcendence. A sense of encounter with the divine may be gleaned from two examples that I shall now explore.

Two very different passages, one from the Bible and the other from the Bhagavad Gita, are employed by Chignell and Halteman to convey something of this sense of the majesty and awfulness of the deity. The biblical example depicts the prophet Elijah encountering God on Mount Horeb as a great and powerful wind tears at the mountains and shatters the rocks. An earthquake and fire also accompany the presence of God, but a further aspect of the deity is mentioned as a 'gentle whisper'.<sup>814</sup> The Bhagavad Gita shows the might of the deity made manifest in the Lord Krishna. Here, in a vision, Krishna makes known his power to his charioteer, Arjuna:

It was a multiform, wondrous vision,  
With countless mouths and eyes  
And celestial ornaments  
Brandishing many divine weapons.  
[...] Arjuna saw all the universe in many ways and parts  
Standing as one in the body  
Of the god of gods  
Then filled with astonishment  
His hair bristling on his flesh

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<sup>813</sup> Schwartz, *Transcendence*, p. 130.

<sup>814</sup> 1 Kings 19. 11-13.

Arjuna bowed his head to the God.<sup>815</sup>

The two examples of human encounter with the divine evoke a sense of the transcendent. To Elijah, who had hitherto feared for his life as he fled from Queen Jezebel, there was given a spectacle of divine power presumably in order to strengthen him for the ongoing arduous task of calling for social justice and prophesying to the nation.<sup>816</sup> For the charioteer, Arjuna, the power and might of the divinity, although previously hidden, is revealed in and through the being of Krishna. With the stories of Elijah and Arjuna, a sense of the numinous emerges and the writers of the two sets of scripture attempt to present the unrepresentable. Here is an example of human nature reaching beyond itself and experiencing the transcendent.

Although the experiences of Elijah and Arjuna enter our literature from the distant past, Gavin Hopps, in his examination of what he calls ‘postmodern enchantments’, points to ‘a re-awakened sense of mystery in the world’ that greets us in contemporary culture.<sup>817</sup> The ‘sense of mystery’ points to a sacredness that leads on to the idea of transcendence. I shall now consider Hopps’s contribution to the concept of transcendence and the presence of the sacred in the world.

### **Contemporary culture and the ineffable**

From Hopps’s discussion of postmodern culture and its fascination in film and fiction with ‘vampires, aliens, androids and zombies’, it becomes clear that even in what is, to a large extent, a desacralised world there is still a longing for that which lies beyond the ordinary and a search to satisfy the human spirit with something other than that which is known.<sup>818</sup> This is what Hopps refers to as ‘ontological trespassing’, or in other words a continued investigation into the theory of the nature of being and how humanity understands and responds. Hopps finds some credence given to popular culture in the work of Christopher Partridge, who claims that there is a ‘sacralising’ aspect that has a ‘shaping effect on

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<sup>815</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, 11. 12-14, trans. by Barbara Stoler-Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

<sup>816</sup> 1 Kings 19. 2-3.

<sup>817</sup> Gavin Hopps, ed., *Byron’s Ghosts: The Spectral, the Spiritual and the Supernatural* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 5.

<sup>818</sup> Hopps, *Byron’s Ghosts*, p. 5.

Western plausibility structures'.<sup>819</sup> The increasing place of the Gothic, with its sense of the mysterious and the magical, may be accountable for aspects of belief that the postmodern generation, in particular, is willing to accept. The place of religion is not neglected in the explosion of the culture of choice available and presents itself to those who choose to engage with it. However, the many spiritualities, referred to by Partridge as 'occulture' as they are a mixture of the occult and culture, present themselves as 'a confluence of secularisation and sacralisation'.<sup>820</sup> Partridge's points are very perceptive, suggesting a means of uniting both the secular and the religious in the life of the individual. As Hopps goes on to state, 'technology has opened up a new form of transcendence or "technochantment", which includes a "technologization" of the ineffable'.<sup>821</sup> The attempt to describe the ineffable becomes more and more complex as new possibilities continue to appear in terms of film and technology that challenge particular stances and question one's place in the world. The ideas of the past saw an understanding of religion or the secular as bounded by certain limitations, but postmodern choices have enlarged and complicated the many spiritual directions that humanity can choose to follow. Hopps speaks of 'the contemporary re-enchantment of the real' in relation to T. E. Hulme's 'spilt religion'.<sup>822</sup> The 'spilt religion' Hulme speaks of becomes a catalyst for sacrality in romantic literature.<sup>823</sup> Could an entrance into the sublime and the numinous by postmodern culture throw any light on the concepts or does it complicate and contradict their meanings?

Hopps acknowledges that these are 'fictional representations of the world' and finds support for his claim in Slavoj Žižek, who states, 'things do not need to exist in order to have an effect'.<sup>824</sup> Philip Shaw, in his essay 'Twixt Life and Death', focuses on Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan* in light of the sublime. Shaw speaks of 'the opening out of consciousness to the haunting of the divine'.<sup>825</sup> The 'haunting of the divine' suggests some initial activity on the part of the deity and also the possibility of a response

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<sup>819</sup> Hopps, *Byron's Ghosts*, p. 6.

<sup>820</sup> Hopps, *Byron's Ghosts*, p. 6.

<sup>821</sup> Hopps, *Byron's Ghosts*, p. 7; spelling of 'technologization' as in original text.

<sup>822</sup> Hopps, *Byron's Ghosts*, p. 11.

<sup>823</sup> Hopps, *Byron's Ghosts*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>824</sup> Hopps, *Byron's Ghosts*, p. 5.

<sup>825</sup> Philip Shaw, 'Twixt Life and Death', edited. by Gavin Hopps, *Byron's Ghosts: The Spectral, the Spiritual and the Supernatural*, pp. 147-160 (p. 147).

from the subject. Shaw explores Byron's objection to the 'ambitions of the sublime to take the place of religion' and refers to Žižek's 'suspicion of the transcendental aspirations of the sublime'.<sup>826</sup> Such an understanding of the sublime as leaning towards religion can be conceived, since although Longinus's *Peri Hypsous* was originally to do with fine writing, there were indeed references in his work to religion (e.g., his quotation from Genesis, 'Let there be Light!').

Throughout its history, the sublime has had an association with religion, especially in the work of John Dennis and that of John Baillie, the latter of whom wrote in 1747, 'We often confess the Sublime as we do the Deity; It fills and dilates our Soul without being able to penetrate into its Nature, and define its Essence'.<sup>827</sup> Baillie, therefore, presents an analogy between human experience of the sublime and that of the divine going beyond the limits of ordinary experience.<sup>828</sup> An attempt to go beyond the ordinary takes place in the television series *Game of Thrones*, which is an American fantasy drama created by David Benioff and D. B. Weiss and based on George R. R. Martin's novel, *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Supernatural elements and fantasy themes are woven into the presentations. The development of technology, which makes virtual reality possible, and the presence of artificially created sensory experiences add to the seeming possibilities of reaching beyond our place in the world and give a new freedom to our imagination. There is a current appetite, therefore, for imaginary worlds where magic and magical creatures exist. Is there a difference, then, between the present generation's longings for something other than the ordinary and the eighteenth-century theorists' search for, and description of sublime moments as they trekked and explored the French Alps? What emerges in the examples I have given is the insatiable desire of the human spirit to reach beyond that which is known and to seek for answers, whether real or imagined, to the question of transcendence. Are we what Alison Milbank terms 'overreachers'? I now go on to explore this term.

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<sup>826</sup> Shaw, 'Twixt Life and Death', p. 147.

<sup>827</sup> Morris, *The Religious Sublime*, p. 130. Capitalisation occurs in original text.

<sup>828</sup> Morris, *The Religious Sublime*, p. 130.

Alison Milbank speaks of the *Don Juan* overreacher in *Manfred*, ‘who sought to go beyond the confines of his own mortality’.<sup>829</sup> She sees in this human yearning a ‘Gnostic desire to break beyond the limits of the human and material’.<sup>830</sup> Some difference can be recognised in what is revealed here between today’s culture and the sublime. The sublime, although sought in some cases, is an experience credited with meeting a person quite unexpectedly, as in the sense of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Modern day attempts to create a sense of the beyond have the benefits of current technology, as I explored earlier, but it begs the question as to what is genuine and what is not. While today’s fantasy films may hardly require extremes of intellectual engagement, the challenges presented by the sublime and the numinous are intellectually demanding by putting the subject at the centre. When considering the sublime and the numinous in the contemporary world, are we looking, therefore, at two ideas: that which is pure fantasy and that which may or may not involve the place of deity in the experience? Today’s seemingly secular preoccupation with the beyond may lie somewhere between truth and fiction but it is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. With some of the recent films and television series that endeavour to reach toward the ‘beyond’ in mind, Emily Brady reflects upon tragic art and the sublime.<sup>831</sup>

In *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, Brady argues that ‘while artistic genres such as horror and tragedy can evoke some of the emotions we associate with the sublime [...] this is not sufficient to classify them in terms of sublimity’.<sup>832</sup> One imagines that Brady is arguing here for the subtler side of sublimity, which can include beauty and elevation of the mind resulting in a transcendent state. Doran makes a helpful point in respect of this in his discussion on Burke and sublime individualism, where he considers a political system based on a mixture of terror and sublimity. Doran is keen to point out that the terror he speaks of is not ‘merely subjugating’, since a sense of awe would rob the subject of freedom, but a ‘combination of reverential awe and a sense of elevation (the dual

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<sup>829</sup> Alison Milbank, ‘Byron, Ann Radcliffe and the Religious Implications of the Explained Supernatural in *Don Juan*’, edited by Gavin Hopps, *Byron’s Ghosts: The Spectral, the Spiritual and the Supernatural*, pp. 165-183 (p. 175).

<sup>830</sup> Milbank, ‘Byron, Ann Radcliffe and the Religious Implications’, p. 175.

<sup>831</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 131.

<sup>832</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, pp. 131-2.

transcendence – structure of sublimity’).<sup>833</sup> Sublimity in this case, and possibly in what Brady is suggesting, is not reliant on the shock-horror of monsters but upon the purer response of higher thinking. Brady’s assertion is that distinctive aspects of the artistic genres and their ‘status as horror or tragedy’ are not necessarily related to the ‘emotions they elicit in the subject.’<sup>834</sup> Brady goes on to say that ‘Art horror plays on our emotions of terror, repulsion, [and] disgust [...] often in relation to monsters of some variety’.<sup>835</sup> Such a description is in keeping with modern day depictions of the world in popular culture, especially that which includes an element of fantasy. Brady considers the ‘paradox of tragedy’, and in doing so refers to the work of Hume, which focuses on the ‘sorrow, terror and anxiety’ that the subject engages in while finding at the same time a delight and satisfaction in the more he or she is affected by the sight.<sup>836</sup> Apart from the experience of both negative and positive emotions, the pleasure felt is related to the extent to which anguish is endured. All this bears some relation to eighteenth-century descriptions of the sublime where, even in the midst of terror and horror, albeit as Burke recommends at a distance, some sense of elation is felt. Brady speaks of ‘the limitations of humanity’ and this must surely be something that drives seekers in the quest for greater and greater possibilities of increased excitement for the human spirit. The limitations felt by humanity are often related to a desire for greater knowledge of that which is beyond the norms of earthly life; whether this is provided by means of technology (as in film) or in the philosophical search for understanding the human condition is an ongoing inquiry.<sup>837</sup> Is it possible, though, to be able to convince a person of the reality of the sublime? James Kirwan thinks not, as I now go on to show.

Kirwan objects to the ways in which the sublime is treated. Aestheticians are accused of trying to ‘talk one into their sublime’, and of high-jacking the concept and explaining it via their most cherished artworks. Kirwan argues that the word sublime:

is already spoken for: it designates a certain kind of involuntary, overwhelming, pleasurable, gut response to an object. It *is* an “affective jolt” not an opinion of an

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<sup>833</sup> Doran, *The Theory of the Sublime*, p. 168. Parentheses as in text.

<sup>834</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 131.

<sup>835</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 131.

<sup>836</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 150.

<sup>837</sup> Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 163.

object into the sharing of which another can be ingeniously argued. You cannot prove something is sublime.<sup>838</sup>

Here, Kirwan is asserting his belief that the sublime not only originates in the mind but also delivers shock treatment to the subject. The difficulty of communicating the experience is highlighted by Kirwan's assertion that arguing and attempting to convince another of the reality of sublime experience is futile, since the sublime is not acquired by persuasion. Some similarity with the numinous can be detected in Kirwan's words. The adjectives used in his description of the sublime (e.g., 'involuntary' and 'overwhelming') are ones that occur when describing the numinous, and here some relationship between the two concepts can be detected. However, Kirwan's use of the word 'pleasurable' in respect of the sublime is not one I would use to describe the numinous and therefore an important difference from my own standpoint arises. Although the numinous, like the sublime, could be said to find its source in the response of the human mind, there is insufficient evidence, even in Otto's thinking, to call it 'pleasurable'.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the sublime and the numinous are concepts that invite criticism. While the sublime can be said, as Shaw points out, to have 'a history', and its development can be traced over the centuries, the numinous is less well known.<sup>839</sup> As Costelloe states, 'in the sublime we inherit a concept with a pedigree that only the breeding of many generations can bestow'.<sup>840</sup> Nevertheless, as a concept it is still called into question as I have shown in my consideration of Elkins's essay, and it may be defended or not. However, it holds a certain fascination being associated with leading writers, theorists, and poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For many, the concept fulfilled a need to explain the sense of reaching beyond the normal and the usual enterprises of human life. It also comes across as an experience that appears to make it available to those who are

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<sup>838</sup> James Kirwan, *Sublimity: The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 157. I understand Kirwan's words, 'talk one into their sublime', to mean that Kirwan objects to those who give the name 'sublime' to their own work and try to pass it off as such.

<sup>839</sup> Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 4.

<sup>840</sup> Costelloe, *The Sublime*, p. 7.

what we would call the middle classes, literati, and intelligentsia. The records of the sublime indicate that it requires time for indulgence, for example as in the case of John Dennis and Joseph Addison who travelled to parts of Europe and reflected on their experiences. The numinous, however, is a far more mysterious concept and one that is filled with inscrutability.

Contemporary thinkers on the sublime and the numinous show extreme variations in their reflections on the concepts. Elkins finds no place of relevance for the sublime in contemporary thinking and would have it annihilated. However, he makes a very important point about historical ideas of the sublime, which he claims were viewed in a religious context. Deligiorgi perceives some of the recent theories of the sublime to be informed by Kantian ethics, while Sircello doubts whether a theory of the sublime is at all possible. An important contribution to the concept of the numinous is made by Raphael in her exploration of Otto's *Das Heilige*. Raphael argues that Otto's text presents a God who is more akin to the fear and awe that Otto speaks of rather than the God of love preached from Jewish and Christian scriptures. However, I would argue that there is a possibility of a relationship between the sublime and the numinous inasmuch as the former displays many of the features of the latter, for example, the fear and terror that both are likely to evoke and their very mysteriousness. Otto did not totally separate the two but called the sublime a 'pale reflection' of the numinous, as I discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.

My study has illuminated differences and similarities between the concepts of the sublime and the numinous, which have led me to conclude that, while both concepts give the appearance of overlapping at times, in terms of human experience the sublime is easier to comprehend and has warranted greater attention and criticism. I would add further that while the sublime makes a gesture towards the numinous, the numinous itself is necessarily wholly about the holy.

## Conclusions

Following Longinus's treatise on what he understood as sublimity, there was a lull in the attention paid to the sublime for many centuries. Although there had been earlier translations of the work, it was the emergence of Boileau's translation of *Peri Hypsous* that led to a greater interest in the concept. My Introduction engaged with Longinus's description of the rhetorical sublime, which powerfully uplifts the soul and, in oratory, gives a sense of elevation. I examined the details of *Peri Hypsous*, along with the needs of the orators and others to whom it was directed. Essays in *The Spectator* in the eighteenth-century fuelled the growing fascination for a deeper understanding and experience of the sublime, and Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* and Kant's interest in the concept gave impetus to theorists, poets, and others who took up the challenge to engage with and comprehend the phenomenon.

My thesis brings the idea of the numinous into the mix. The twin concepts of the sublime and numinous struggle together in the womb of understanding, as Esau and Jacob did within the matriarch Rebecca; they are different and yet alike.<sup>841</sup> My research has shown that Otto had considered the relationship between the concepts of the sublime and the numinous, and he had concluded that the sublime is no more than a pale reflection of the numinous. While the sublime has been mainly understood as a secular concept, the numinous, which shows evidence of a similarity to the sublime, has all the connotations of a religious idea. With these thoughts in mind, I based my research around the received and current discourses on the topics in order to discover to what extent the two ideas could have a commonality. For example, I questioned whether the sublime is rooted in religion, since Longinus made reference in *Peri Hypsous* to the biblical Book of Genesis, with the words 'Let there be Light'. I explored this idea in Chapter Two and concluded that Longinus wanted to associate the sublime with values inherent in religion. He was validating his work, in this instance, with a biblical reference, and as a gesture to the Greek world sought further support from Homer's allusion to divine light. I sought, also, to discover in Chapter Two why John Dennis gave place to a religious interpretation of the sublime. Dennis took

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<sup>841</sup> Genesis 25. 22-23.

up the theme of ‘the esteemed light of God’ and it was that which influenced his approach to the sublime, as my research has demonstrated.<sup>842</sup>

A further question that required an answer was whether the numinous is entirely to do with religion or whether its power is limited as a result of a restriction to religious interpretation. My own view is that the numinous is not restricted by religious interpretation, and nor is it restricted by any interpretation, whether religious or secular. Contrary to scholarly opinion, my research supports the view that the numinous defies reason although, as I shall discuss below, Kant put up a strong and lasting argument, which reaches beyond his own times, for the pre-dominance of reason over any theory of religion. While Otto agreed that there should be an objective approach to religious experience, he disagreed with the view that rational characteristics (such as spirit, reason, good-will, and supreme power) should be attributed to the deity. For those who seek the divine, there is surely the expectation that such attributes are inherent in their object of worship. My thoughts on Otto’s argument, in respect of the characteristics of the divine, are that he is being too dogmatic and extremist, and therefore I must disagree with his position.

As Otto’s thoughts developed he examined the stance of Rationalists such as Descartes, whose ‘school’ introduced Cartesian doubt. Since such doubt encouraged the belief that there is nothing hidden that cannot be discovered, Descartes’ search for truth was very different from Otto’s theory of the numinous. My research has shown that, for Otto, a sense of the numinous was not ‘discovered’ but was rather an encounter with the wholly other, and thus it was more a gift than the result of searching. The gift involved *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the unmistakable signal of the divine.

The question as to whether the nature of the divine is rational or non-rational was examined in Chapter Two of my thesis. It has become evident that the God of whom Otto speaks can be thought of in both these ways. There is no reason why the *rationality* attributed to the divine should be immutable, and there is no reason why a *non-rational* God should be denied. One of the difficulties presented when conceiving of a *non-rational* God lies in attempts to understand the nature of deity. For example, there is a human notion that the intrinsic quality of the deity is goodness. Such an attitude leads to a limiting

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<sup>842</sup> Russell and Winterbottom, *Classical Literary Criticism*, p. 152.

of the total nature of the deity. While it is consoling, for some people, to speak of a God of goodness, a truer picture of an Almighty Being affords a freedom to be that is unrestricted by anthropomorphic projections.

I emphasised Otto's argument for a return to what he understood as holiness. His conception of holiness was not to do with moral goodness but lay in the traditional understanding of the word, which was connected with being separate, set apart, sacred, and dedicated to the deity. Mere human goodness was not, in Otto's view, to be equated with holiness, which may or may not have something to do with experience of the numinous. This all begs the question as to whether a state of separateness, or holiness, is a pre-requisite for an experience of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Whether such a state is necessary for sublime experience has emerged from my research as a non-essential requirement. I can say, though, that from biblical evidence and, following an experience of the numinous, the subject is highly likely to gain understanding of the difference between the holy and the profane. I demonstrated such experiences in Chapter One when I discussed the religious and spiritual encounters of the Hebrew patriarch Jacob and the prophet Isaiah.

Texts on the sublime refer to it as beyond the limits of reason. The question of reason emerges regularly in my work, especially in consideration of Kant's views on the topic in Chapter Three. Kant's emphasis on reason, imagination, and understanding gave Otto some guidance when considering the cognitive elements of the numinous. The mathematically and dynamically sublime, as expressed by Kant, established for the sublime the difference between that which is absolutely great in size and that which is absolutely great in power. Kant's findings informed thinkers who sought to penetrate the mysteries of the sublime, and in Otto's case they provided a springboard for the latter's thoughts on the numinous. An aspect of Kant's thought that had sway over Otto's thinking was his view on morality and his attempt to reconcile it with religious belief. As far as Otto was concerned, a sense of morality, as described by Kant, was not necessary for an experience of the numinous. Here my line of thinking is in agreement with Otto. The necessity of achieving an acceptable level of morality, whether personal or communal, would have no place in Otto's thinking in respect of the numinous, since such a requirement would certainly

restrict the phenomenal experience. The question of personal and communal morality was demonstrated in Chapter One, when I referred to the prophet Isaiah. I showed that his experience, which I would call an encounter with the numinous and *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, highlighted his own and the nation's poor moral state. Simultaneously, holiness and a sense of sinfulness fill him with terror. He is acutely aware of his own morally unclean state and that of the nation. Here Otto's theory that moral goodness is not equated with holiness is borne out. Holiness, which is associated with the numinous, as my research has demonstrated, brings forth fear, trembling, and dread. These emotions resonate with experiences of the sublime. For Burke, the sublime took on the quality of the terrible, and fear and terror were its hallmarks. Only at a distance and away from physical danger could safety be found and the sublime in its majesty be enjoyed. A further description of the sublime associated it with the natural world, where Burke saw it as inherent. I showed that Burke, in his description of the sublime, focused on objects, an idea that later evolved to a focus on internal states. The internal states Burke understood as obscurity, power, vacuity, darkness, and silence, aspects of the sublime that threaten and yet are described as resulting in pleasurable experiences.

While the sublime was capable of engaging the imagination of Burke, Kant, and of other eighteenth-century theorists, Schleiermacher, as I pointed out in Chapter Four, complains that among his acquaintances anything to do with religion was viewed with suspicion.<sup>843</sup> His thinking was shaped by a friendship with Friedrich Schlegel, along with the potent influences of Kant and German romantic notions of the sublime. Nevertheless, he remained faithful to his promise to his friends to produce a book on religion. While Schleiermacher understood the essence of religion to be a feeling of absolute dependence, Otto could not agree with the sentiment. A sense of absolute dependence is not, to my thinking, anything like a sense of the numinous, which is dramatically active and unpredictable, as Otto understands it.

Chapter Five of my thesis, which focused on the mundane, the transcendent, and the immanent, looked more deeply into Otto's account of the numinous and *mysterium tremendum*. As he probes the mysteries of the hidden, the esoteric, and the unfamiliar in

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<sup>843</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 4.

his description of an experience of the divine, Otto moves on to other emotions felt by the subject, with the awareness of 'awefulness' and the emotions of fear and dread taking a central part. Such emotions are similar to those experienced during a sublime encounter, but from the evidence of my research I must conclude that the numinous is far more intense and strikes the subject with greater force. When confronted by Otto's language concerning the numinous and *mysterium tremendum*, where is the place of reason that is so authoritative in Kant's thinking? The answer, according to my research, is that in this case it becomes redundant and any privilege it enjoys on the pinnacle of theology and philosophy is precarious.

A significant question, which I covered in Chapter Six, is how ideas of the sublime and the numinous are received in contemporary thought and why that matters. My thesis considered postmodern culture and described how the desire to reach beyond the ordinary and the secular has established itself in film and fiction, assisted by new forms of technology. A new satisfaction is enjoyed by the human spirit as it reaches beyond itself towards the transcendent.

My research has shown that one of the difficulties confronting thinkers on the topics of the sublime and numinous is the ineffability of the concepts, which creates challenges in attempts to describe the phenomena. The sublime particularly faces challenges from writers on the subject, many of whom fail to understand its popularity. For example, James Elkins makes a demand for a moratorium on the word, and he calls into question any respect or allegiance to the sublime. He claims that the word is in need of a definition and continues his attempt to annihilate the concept. He does recognise, however, that in the past the sublime would have been understood as religious truth or revelation. With such a comment, Elkins inadvertently makes a statement in favour of a relationship between the two concepts. Another implication of Elkins's view is that he recognises a religious basis for the sublime, which is good news for anyone wishing to unite the two concepts.

The desire to find meaning in the divine and the place of the secular continues to interest theologians and philosophers. However, the sheer complexity of the ways in which deity is projected contributes to the ongoing enigma, and only very slowly can definitive answers be possible. My research strongly suggests a relationship between the states of

sublime and numinous experience. The twin concepts display a family likeness and similar characteristics. I do recognise, however, that personal interpretation carries weight when arriving at a conclusion. For example the secular mind will not necessarily interpret sublime experience as being an encounter with the divine, whereas a person of a religious frame of mind is likely to look for a religious explanation to experiences beyond the usual and ordinary.

A greater understanding of the sacred and the profane would be a way to move forward from my own findings, since there is a certain amount of ignorance surrounding the concepts. As I showed in Chapter One, Durkheim took up the question of how the sacred and the profane can be understood. The former he found to be inherent in the unity of the ethnic group he studied, while the profane was to do with the ordinary and the mundane. Other understandings of the concepts are that the sacred is to do with being set apart, or dedicated to the worship of a deity. The profane is better understood as anything that is un-consecrated, not separate from the ordinary, and not sacred. I conclude from my research that, far from being easily distinguishable, the sacred and the profane, like the sublime and the numinous, are hard to differentiate and therefore they are in need of further specific and detailed research.

The central theme of my argument has been to explore the similarities and differences between the sublime and the numinous, and to consider if and how they can be brought together. The sum of the origins of the sublime, the advent of the numinous, and the subsequent discussions put forward, point to great similarities and many discernible characteristics shared by the two concepts. Ultimately, I conclude that they are each distinctive, the sublime leaning towards the secular and the numinous to the religious, but still they must learn to live together. They could be brought closer if there was a greater understanding, acceptance, and respect for the numinous, however mysterious it appears. The sublime, however, is clearly a pointer towards the numinous.

My thesis has shown that, like tectonic plates, the ground beneath the sublime and the numinous is continually moving and shifting. Writing in the *Church Times*, the theologian Alister McGrath quotes Bertrand Russell on philosophy, claiming that the latter's words could be applied to theology (and to the sublime and the numinous), as he

states that philosophy's purpose is to show us 'how to live with uncertainty, and yet without being paralysed by hesitation'.<sup>844</sup> Such an approach is a way forward for the sublime and the numinous.

As an original contribution to the field of enquiry, this thesis adds substantially and in a novel way to our understanding of Rudolf Otto, the numinous, and the sublime. It becomes clear that there are mystical experiences and emotions accredited to the sublime as a secular concept and the numinous as a religious concept, which impose themselves on the human spirit. Otto was not embarrassed to speak of religious feelings and the awe they inspire, and nor were the eighteenth-century theorists reluctant to express their joy and sense of being overwhelmed by the experiences of the sublime. Yet whilst there has been, historically speaking, an evolution in the understanding and development of the sublime, the numinous has been relatively overlooked, and has been investigated by only a few individuals. Both the sublime and the numinous, as my research highlights, have their distinctive characteristics and while at times appearing to be the same are not, since the sublime has, in essence, a secular nature while the numinous emanates from a religious background. My claim is that the sublime and the numinous, although very much alike and requiring discernment at every level, continue to be different, demanding attention and examination to justify their well-deserved place in human consciousness and aesthetic awareness.

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<sup>844</sup> Alister McGrath, 'Back Page Interview', in *Church Times* (Horncastle: Mortons Printers and Publishers, 2017), p. 56; accessed 7<sup>th</sup> July 2017, [www.churchtimes.co.uk](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk).

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