The Sublime in Modern Philosophy

Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature

In *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature*, Emily Brady takes a fresh look at the sublime and shows why it endures as a meaningful concept in contemporary philosophy. In a reassessment of historical approaches, the first part of the book identifies the scope and value of the sublime in eighteenth-century philosophy (with a focus on Kant), nineteenth-century philosophy and Romanticism, and early wilderness aesthetics. The second part examines the sublime’s contemporary significance through its relationship to the arts; its position with respect to other aesthetic categories involving mixed or negative emotions, such as tragedy; and its place in environmental aesthetics and ethics. Far from being an outmoded concept, the sublime, Brady argues, is a distinctive aesthetic category which reveals an important, if sometimes challenging, aesthetic-moral relationship with the natural world.

Emily Brady is Professor of Environment and Philosophy at the Institute of Geography and Environment and an Academic Associate in Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. Her research interests include environmental aesthetics (nature, art, cultural landscapes, and everyday life), environmental ethics, Kant, and eighteenth-century philosophy. Brady is the author of *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (2003) and the co-editor of *Aesthetic Concepts: Essays after Sibley* (2001), *Humans in the Land: The Ethics and Aesthetics of the Cultural Landscape* (2008), and *Human-Environment Relations: Transformative Values in Theory and Practice* (2012). Brady has been a Laurance S. Rockefeller Faculty Fellow at Princeton University’s Center for Human Values and is a past president of the International Society for Environmental Ethics.
In Memory of Ronald W. Hepburn
The Sublime in Modern Philosophy

Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature

EMILY BRADY

University of Edinburgh
Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
It furthers the University’s mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521194143

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First published 2013

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Brady, Emily.
The sublime in modern philosophy : aesthetics, ethics, and nature / Emily Brady,
University of Edinburgh.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-19414-3 (hardback)
BR301.S7B73 2014
111'.85—dc23 2012043759
ISBN 978-0-521-19414-3 Hardback

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4. The Empire State Building, New York. Photo by the author, page 143
I first began thinking seriously about the sublime in the late 1990s, while I was at Lancaster University. Some of the motivating ideas of this book originated in conversations about Kant with my colleague there, Michael Hammond, and I am grateful to him for encouraging me to formulate, in particular, the beginnings of a key argument which now appears in Chapter 3. I am indebted to several other people for very helpful discussions and correspondence about questions and issues in this book, some of whom also commented on draft material: Simon Burton, Denis Dumas, John Fisher, Paul Guyer, Nicole Hall-Elfick, Glenn Parsons, Sandra Shapsay, James Shelley, Alison Stone, and Rachel Zuckert. I am also grateful to anonymous reviewers for providing invaluable feedback on the manuscript, as well as the encouragement I needed to complete the project. Tim Costelloe kindly allowed me to read the manuscript for a new edited collection, The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), prior to its publication. Ryan Cook’s careful copyediting, as well as his critical comments, were vital to me in preparing the final manuscript. Beatrice Rehl and Isabella Vitti at Cambridge University Press provided steady and expert editorial support and guidance.

I would like to acknowledge a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to participate in the summer seminar ‘Scottish Enlightenment Aesthetics and Beyond’ in St Andrews, organized by Rachel Zuckert and Paul Guyer. This grant enabled me to work closely with key texts from eighteenth-century aesthetic theory, and to benefit from discussions with colleagues at the seminar. A grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland enabled me to complete portions of the manuscript while spending time as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania, where Paul Guyer was my gracious host.
Acknowledgements

A Laurance S. Rockefeller Visiting Faculty Fellowship from the Center for Human Values at Princeton University and research leave from the University of Edinburgh made it possible to complete the second part of the book. I am especially thankful to the Center’s staff, faculty, and Fellows for providing an ideal place for thinking about aesthetics, ethics, and environmental values.


I have presented material for the book to various conferences, including the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting, the American Society of Aesthetics Pacific Division Meeting, the Ethics and Aesthetics of Architecture and Environment Conference, the International Society of Aesthetics Annual Meeting, and the Tate Contemporary Sublime Symposium, as well as to research seminars at Auburn University, Franklin and Marshall College, the London Aesthetics Forum, Nottingham University, Princeton Theological Seminary, the University of Edinburgh, and the University of Ottawa. I thank these various audiences for their criticisms and comments. I am especially grateful to the British Society of Aesthetics for inviting me to present a paper (an early version of Chapter 8) to its annual conference, for a session in honour of Ronald W. Hepburn’s eightieth birthday.

I have dedicated this book to the memory of Ronald W. Hepburn. His philosophical ideas, style, and generous approach to the study of aesthetics have deeply inspired me. Ronnie’s particular interest in the sublime was relatively uncommon in philosophy but was not really unusual for him, given his work on the overlaps and boundaries between aesthetics, moral philosophy, and religion. Without the insights from our conversations about the sublime, and his writings on aesthetics of nature, my thinking on this topic would be seriously impoverished.
Acknowledgements

I would also like to thank my family and friends for conversations about this book and for sharing their own experiences of the sublime with me. From memorable childhood days spent camping in Yosemite to my more recent wanderings in the mountains of Scotland and the Lake District, sublime places continue to have great meaning for me, and to them I am perhaps most grateful.