

ethics), philosophy of literature and aesthetics more generally, and metaphilosophy (for certain essays' exemplification of an 'ocular,' post-Wittgensteinian alternative to more common approaches to philosophizing, and for the collection's relevance to considerations of the use of thought experiments in philosophy). It will also appeal to those outside of philosophy with interests in literature in general, or the particular literary works and authors discussed, especially Jane Austin and Coetzee. It is whole-heartedly recommended for readers with these interests.

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The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant

ROBERT DORAN

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Robert Doran's *The Theory of the Sublime from Longinus to Kant* traces the development of the concept from its first recorded mention in the Greek fragment *Peri hypsous* (*On the Sublime*)—dated to either the first or third century and attributed to 'Longinus'—through to its role in Kant's philosophy. Because of his project's scope, Doran's discussion is necessarily selective in the authors on whom he focuses. The most attention is paid to Kant, whose concept of the sublime takes up the final third of the book. The first two chapters cover Longinus, with Nicolas Boileau, John Dennis and Edmund Burke—three thinkers positioned as playing central roles in transmitting Longinus's ideas to the modern age and furthering their development—getting a chapter each.

Doran's main thesis is that the concept of the sublime operates as a secular analogue to religious transcendence, allowing a mystical or quasi-religious dimension into art, rhetoric and experiences of nature, as well as allowing an aesthetic dimension into the communication of religious ideas. A second thesis of Doran's, which is underdeveloped and not as plausibly argued, is that the eighteenth century idea of the sublime is connected to the adoption of aristocratic values by the new bourgeois class, as it allowed the bourgeoisie to experience a nobility of mind and to think of themselves as 'elevated.' The first thesis is plausible for the modern iteration of the sublime, which was largely a reaction against both neoclassicism in theories of 'taste' and a scientific/mechanistic world-picture that left little room for wonder, especially in experiences of nature. However, it is not as immediately plausible as a reading of *Peri hypsous*, which predates modern science and the accompanying 'disenchantment of the world' and where much of the focus is on sublimity in rhetoric and literature. This remains a problem for Doran's thesis even if one rejects the interpretation that *Peri hypsous* is *merely* a rhetorical treatise.

In order to read Longinus as the first secularizer of a predominantly religious notion of transcendence, Doran claims a substantial connection between (i) the nobility or elevation of the minds of the speaker or author who is able to employ the 'grand style,' and the reader or listener who is able to register the sublimity of mind expressed in their words, and (ii) Longinus's remarks on nature's grandeur and on sublimity of mind raising one "towards the spiritual greatness of god" (85). Doran's argument that Longinus's

remarks offer a substantial connection, rather than just an analogy, between the elevation/greatness of divinity and the elevation/greatness of the mind of one who can express or register sublime ideas, needs to be more convincing. If anything, Longinus's remarks on nature's grandeur and the 'naturalness' of our attraction to it seem to associate the sublimity of mind of one who expresses or registers sublime ideas with a natural propensity, *in contrast to* the ancient notion of poetic greatness being due to divine inspiration; hence, more needs to be said to show that Doran's central thesis applies to Longinus.

This points to a potential problem with Doran's book, which is a possible tendency to read later ideas into earlier ones, and to attribute aspects of more recent versions of a concept to earlier stages of its development, which makes any historical lines of influence proposed suspect. It is not as clear as it should be that Doran avoids doing this; his tendency to see ideas of later thinkers in earlier ones runs throughout his book, and while it is more plausible when claiming traces of, e.g., Kant's ideas in Burke, or Burke's in Dennis, it is less plausible for Doran's claims for nearly every aspect of the Kantian sublime having its roots in Longinus, although the case made for Longinus being a *general* influence on Kant is convincing. It is hard, given the space of this review, to provide enough examples to show this convincingly. One such example, though, is Doran's claim that Longinus's remark about our thoughts being able to transcend our surroundings "*clearly suggests* the idea of a *limitless expansion* of the mind" (85, my emphasis), and that Longinus's treatise therefore contains the idea of infinity that is important for Kant. This part of Longinus's treatise, however, suggests no such thing unless one is reading it with the idea of infinity already in mind.

Despite the hermeneutic worry and the concerns it raises for some of Doran's historical claims, Doran's book is thoroughly researched, comprehensively presented, and the philosophical elements of Kant's thought are handled well, especially given Doran's background in French literature rather than philosophy. Unfortunately, the book's main aim falls somewhat short, and while I recommend Doran's book to readers interested in the history of the idea of the sublime, such readers would be advised to supplement their reading with one or two of the other existing discussions of this history cited by Doran, which go into more depth in certain areas and discuss the idea's post-Kantian influence and development in philosophical aesthetics and the humanities more generally. In addition, the discussions of Boileau, Dennis and Burke are likely too brief for those primarily interested in these thinkers, and do not clearly add to the existing scholarship on them apart from some connections claimed with Longinus and Kant; similarly, the chapters on Kant, although good, cover territory gone over more thoroughly by other authors. Nevertheless, Doran's book will interest Kantian scholars for the possible historical roots of, and influences on, Kant's ideas—and not just those in the third critique, since Doran outlines the role of the sublime in the first two critiques and in Kant's anthropological lectures. It would also serve both as a good, accurate introduction to multiple aspects of Kant's thought for those outside philosophy, and as a comprehensive introduction to Longinus's *Peri hypsous* and the debates surrounding it, and is recommended for these purposes.

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