

Introduction

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WONDER IS A FACE that we have known very well. It is the face we recognize in the gaze of children, turned upward and outward toward a world that consists of a concatenation of first-time experiences and exposures to historical firsts. In this face, the look of wonder has often shaded into others, as in a look of open humility and artless vulnerability confronted with the visible world.

This wonder is one we may call natural twice over: in sharing the naturalness we ascribe to childhood, and in being a wonder that often appears to be torn from the outward-looking gaze with the spontaneity of a sudden, effortless gasp. It is a gasp that will accompany many of the moments, even in later years, when we are confronted with something extraordinary beheld or experienced for the very first time: our first sight of a rainbow or of snow, our first vision of the solemnly silent crystalline interior of a long-undiscovered cave, of the pummeling descent of a powerful waterfall or the swirl-colored underwater, of the world below seen from an airplane window.

Yet if wonder has had a natural place in our lives, it has also occupied another kind of role in a series of activities and pursuits that we may call “practices,” not only in the loosest sense that may be drawn out of the Greek root of this term (*prattein*, to act)—an iterated, organized activity; a doing (*praxis*) disciplined by reflection—but also in the thicker terms that Alasdair MacIntyre made available to us in one of his works, emphasizing that such disciplined acting has a history, a tradition, internal standards of excellence and conceptions of its internal goods. By the term *practice*, in MacIntyre’s words, we may understand

Practices of Wonder

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.¹

Tic-tac-toe and throwing a football with skill do not count as practices on this definition, though the game of chess or the game of football do. Planting turnips and bricklaying are not a practice, but farming and architecture are. The inquiries of scientists and historians, and the activities of philosophers and artists, offer themselves as paradigmatic examples of this term's scope.

Using these terms, we may say that wonder has occupied a special and significant place in many of our most valued practices, including those that MacIntyre makes central to his account. Its place in philosophy was marked early on by Plato's oft-rehearsed words in the *Theaetetus* that named wonder as the beginning of philosophy, which were later rehearsed by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, and were due to echo throughout the length of philosophical history—a history that was not, of course, exclusively philosophical but was shared by other disciplines, including science, that remained for a long time intertwined, sharing their textual and conceptual inspirations. In religious or spiritual practices, again, wonder—along with its associated concepts, such as awe—has sometimes been seen as the religious passion *par excellence*. In art, similarly, wonder has at different times figured prominently in the ideals for the aesthetic experience that works of art should aim to (re)produce.

The appearance of wonder at so many important locations in our practices serves, on the one hand, as a testimony to the inherent complexity of this emotion. For if, in many of our philosophical, scientific, and other intellectual inquiries, wonder has often been cast as the passion of inquiry and connected with the desire to know and understand, its presence in other practices, as in spiritual or aesthetic contexts—if indeed we may draw these boundaries with sufficient distinctness—brings to the fore its character, not merely as a questing or inquisitive, but more importantly, as an appreciative response. And if this consideration attunes us to one source of complexity, we should also be prepared to be attuned to another. For this plurality of appearances across different practices should not mask

1. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

important differences—differences subject to historical evolution—in the exact nature of each appearance, even in what (with some license) we may permit ourselves to call a “single” practice.

The kind of differences in question are already visible in one of the examples listed above: for if wonder was jointly claimed as the beginning of philosophy by both Plato and Aristotle, this should not make us overlook the difference in both location and content that define these kinds of wonder—the latter outward-looking, directed to natural phenomena, and positioned at the beginning of inquiry with the assumption that explanation should purge it, the other inward-looking, toward conceptual phenomena, and positioned not only at the beginning of inquiry but also as its pursued end. And such different understandings, as several papers in this volume suggest, are ones that have continued to be elaborated and developed throughout the history of philosophical conversation. Here, MacIntyre’s terms afford us useful ways of expressing these differences, for they may be rephrased as ones that contest the place wonder should occupy in the standards of excellence and epistemological ideals that govern philosophical inquiry. And armed with those terms, one may go on to make other fruitful statements about the changing place of wonder in the standards and ends governing other practices, as several papers in this volume suggest. Change, for example, is the implicit context for the paper by Olivier Doron, which focuses on the place of wonder in scientific practice, and more specifically in the use of the microscope, in a period between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which the epistemological ideals of scientific inquiry—and the position of wonder within them—were tied to the spiritual and religious ends that the study of the natural world was understood as serving. Yet this position, and the understanding of wonder it imported, registered not only a change from attitudes in the preceding period, but also provided the measure for changes still to come, as not only the place of passion among the epistemological ideals (or standards of excellence) of scientific inquiry, but also the view of the ends science served, came to be revised.² Speaking in the context of aesthetics, and working in a similar time frame though with a stronger anchor in the classical literary tradition, Alexander Rueger likewise calls our attention to the changes affecting the place of wonder in literary works and, later on, in conceptions of aesthetic experience. The story of these changes, his account suggests, can partly be told in terms of a distinction, and debate, concerning the exact place that wonder should occupy in the artistic process, and more

2. For the broader context of these changes, see Daston and Park, *Wonders*.

Practices of Wonder

specifically whether it should figure as part of its means (in the context of the classical view that rhetorical and literary art aims at persuasion, and emotions may serve as means for achieving it) or as its intrinsic end (as asserted by the Baroque art theorists Rieger focuses on).

The contrast, of course, between a natural wonder and a practiced wonder is not meant to be drawn too sharply. For after all, it is often the natural wonder of first-time experiences—the spontaneous gasp torn from our lips as we confront something that strikes us as extraordinary—that often coincides with the wonder that has historically offered, and continues to offer, to practices their beginnings, and the sources of their continued reflection. Yet if this contrast is worth drawing, and preserving, it is partly because of the way it helps widen our understanding of the kind of relationship in which we may stand to this emotion, and makes available to us a broader notion of its nature and content. For in many of those practices in which wonder has been claimed as an important passion, wonder has often been, not so much the spontaneous and effortless reaction to something novel and unexpected—to the “extraordinary” considered as what naturally stands out of the ordinary and arrests our attention (wonder as an effortless beginning, natural in the second sense identified above). Wonder has often presented itself, not as a given, but rather as a passion to be mastered, often requiring an effort on our part to see something *as* extraordinary where we did not do so before. For, after all, isn't the process of learning to philosophize or to think scientifically or to experience the world in certain aesthetic ways at the same time a discipline initiating the learner to the capacity to wonder at things not wondered at before, introducing a wonderment that, while in some respects no doubt recovering, or partaking of, an earlier child-like spontaneity, is the product of a deliberately and purposefully wielded technique?

And to lay stress on the nature of wonder as a product dependent on discipline and learning involves, as may be readily seen, giving a different account, incorporating different stresses, of the objects that impart to it its content. For in the plurality of practices in which wonder is a willfully cultivated response, one's effort is often turned upon the task of entrancing one's attention to the wondrousness, not of what is extraordinary, abnormal, or irregular in our experience, but indeed of what is most ordinary and most regular, in order to see it under its aspect—in its very orderliness—as an extraordinary thing. This extension of the account seems to be urged most compellingly by scientific inquiry, with its defamiliarizing attention to the regularities in nature that underlie our capacity to simply

get on with our practical relationship with the world and whose pervasive orderliness makes the ordinariness of an everyday world possible. For here isn't it precisely the most self-evident things—the apple that falls when one releases one's grip and the water that boils when placed on the fire, the magnet that raises the paper clip from the desk or the next step we take as we put our foot forward, as much as solar eclipses and rainbows (or monstrous births or newly discovered species)—that one *ought* to be able to meet with fruitful perplexity and see as though for the first time, at some stage or other of the history of the science or of the individuals who absorb its history and take it forward?

Religious practices could be interestingly compared and contrasted with the sciences in their tendency to encourage a habit of estranging the ordinary by valorizing a perception of the world (and the self) under its aspect as a gift or extraordinary given. In those practices organized around the notion of a creative deity, the contingency of this given can be evoked by considering it as the product of a creative act that might not have taken place, inflaming the imagination with the sharp dichotomy of a “nothing” that preceded this act and a “something”—an “everything”—that immediately succeeded it. (And this initial miracle, which establishes nature, is the ground for the subsequent possibility of miraculous acts that disrupt nature and provoke spontaneous wonder.)

A similar task of estranging the ordinary has been assigned at different times and in different ways to art, whose aim has sometimes been described as that of recovering and renewing our capacity to (“really”) perceive the objects surrounding us, which have retreated into a jaded invisibility by force of habitual use and encounter. The formulation of the Russian Formalist literary critic Viktor Shklovsky about the role of art in “estranging” objects to rescue them from “automatized perception” and to replace mere “recognition” with “sight”³ has much to divide it but also much to unite it, especially in its concern with recovering sight, with the project to which writers belonging to the broader Romantic movement and American Transcendentalists gave voice. Emerson echoes Carlyle and Coleridge echoes Wordsworth (in a train of echo that has a longer and wider life) when talking about the importance of restoring the wondrousness of ordinary things from the “lethargy of custom” and of recovering the child's sense of wonder and the “miraculousness of daily-recurring miracles.”⁴

3. Shklovsky, *Theory*, ch. 1.

4. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 377–84; cf. Tanner, *Reign*.

Practices of Wonder

In philosophy, finally, the dialectic between a natural and a learned capacity to wonder is deeply embedded in the conception of the subject by which philosophers guide themselves. Both as a stage in the development of the discipline and as an episode in the history of the individual apprenticing in it, philosophy may be grounded in a reaction of wonder that forms its natural point of departure. Yet this reaction—and the capacity to experience it—survives as an internal good of philosophical inquiry and as a constituent in the intellectual excellences that govern its practice, as one pursues a critical reflectiveness that dissolves the givenness of the most ordinary things and yields a lesson in surprise that is ceaselessly rehearsed. Rousseau, in his *Discourse on Inequality*, gives voice to many when he speaks of philosophy as that “which man must have to know how to observe once, what he has every day seen.” Even those who censure the particular way in which traditional philosophy goes about its task of being surprised by familiar things—such as the later Wittgenstein, who, among other things, questioned the roots of a specific kind of philosophical amazement at the mind—still appear to engage in a reflective practice oriented around wonder, though with a changed conception of its content and point. It would be a wonder produced by replacing false perceptions about what is “queer” (which correspond to a false sense of the “sublime”) with a truer perception of what is remarkable (“The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity”⁵). This truer perception will be directed towards the language games we play with words and the forms of life that support the possibility of meaning within which philosophy must curb its ambitions, content with describing them and renouncing the ambition to explain, animated throughout by a sense of wonder at the very existence of language itself as the ultimate given.⁶

The presence of wonder in many of our most highly valued practices, in this light, turns out to be a complex one in more ways than one, and there is a host of interesting questions to be raised in tracking it. Questions, certainly, inviting more fine-grained accounts of the position wonder has occupied in the standards and ideals governing different practices; questions concerning the nature of wonder and its peculiar objects as these have been variously understood; and questions, likewise, about the value that we attach to a capacity for wonder.

5. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §129.

6. See Cavell, *Claim*, 15.

For the status of wonder as a beginning and motive force of inquiry would suggest that, in asking about the value of wonder, we might be able to answer this question most intuitively in instrumental and utilitarian terms. Wonder, on these terms, would be as valuable as its capacity to stimulate inquiry and lead us to an understanding of things we had previously not held in our grasp. Yet even there, could the note of utility be sounded exclusively and without ambivalence? Is wonder, as this would imply, only justified so long as explanation has not been attained? Is our right to wonder—as the juridical tones of “justification” would have it—fully abolished once explanation has been secured? (Do we still possess the right to wonder at what would seem to be the most dizzying fact—that there is something instead of nothing—only because scientists have not *yet* provided us with a satisfying answer to the question “why”?) And if the function of wonder is to be liquidated by explanation—as Aristotle himself suggested in the *Metaphysics*—then what sense is one to make of a scientist’s claim to find in wonder “a deep aesthetic passion” that “makes life worth living” or of his project of composing a book on science that aims to arouse wonder and that of course communicates, not what science does *not* know, but what it *does*?⁷

If an instrumental view of wonder should here be questioned, it is challenged even more strongly when we turn to the role of wonder in other domains, including theologically or spiritually motivated practices. For wonder, here, might seem to have the character of a devotional exercise whose end exhausts itself in the perpetuation and celebration of a particular way of perceiving the world—in many theistic practices, as a radically contingent given—considered as a form of knowledge in its own right. When this spiritually motivated attention is turned towards the givens that define one’s individual existence, the training in modal perception is revealed at the same time as a training in moral perception, as when one is taught that one *could* have been born into poverty, or into blindness, or into madness, or not at all. The ethical culmination of this habit of foregrounding the ordinary (one’s riches or vision or reason or existence) by an eliciting background of counterfactual possibility reveals an order of means and ends in which wonder would attract its value under its aspect as an instrument in the service of moral formation. Yet another domain—that of art—would seem close to the spiritual or theological in assigning to the experience of wonder a greater degree of evaluative finality, according to it the intrinsic value of an aesthetic response divorced

7. See Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow*.

Practices of Wonder

from the imperatives of action. (Though here again one might ask: how clean is the distinction between wonder as an aesthetic and as a scientific response?⁸ How clear-cut is the distinction between wonder as part of an aesthetic ideal and wonder as part of a spiritual one?) Questions of value and motivation will clearly be raised in more pressing terms when what is at stake is the disciplined wonder directed to what is most ordinary and familiar. For the order of the ordinary world, after all, is something to which the roots of our attachment run deep, and the need to motivate its disturbance would seem in direct proportion to its power to emotionally disturb. Why strive to acquire awareness of the “enraging wonder of the everyday”?⁹ Why live in rage, or in the need that a sense of mystery—of the “sudden uncanniness” of everything one thought one knew—creates for one who tastes it? Why live with a sense of one’s contingency? Why wonder?

To the extent that such questions are considered with an awareness of the historicity of the emotions, it is clear that they will demand attention to the historically changing character of the answers they have received in different schemes and different periods. One would do well here to follow the lead given by Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park and look toward larger narratives of change and development in which particular conceptions of wonder may be situated. And such a form of attention will be tightly bound with another; for to the extent that one aspires to place on speaking terms experiences of wonder drawn from different historical contexts, one cannot avoid asking: What makes it possible to track the subject of our interest across variegated histories and lends us the certainty that we have identified what can claim to constitute a single subject? What makes it possible in the first place to hold up Plato’s *thaumazein* next to Kant’s *Bewunderung*, Descartes’ *admiration* and Wordsworth’s or (the English-speaking) Wittgenstein’s *wonder*? And if part of the answer lies in tolerating the tension between the essentializing conviction that one can recognize the emotion through its unchanging objects, and the more cautious acknowledgment that the boundaries of these concepts cannot be drawn with perfect clarity and set against each other in terms of conceptual equivalence, one should aspire to finer-grained responses to such strategic conceptual questions.

8. It is a key part of Fisher’s aim, in his *Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*, to question this distinction.

9. Rubenstein, “A Certain Disavowal.”

The considerations set out above, and the questions that run through them, no doubt stand in need of enrichment attuned to the perspectives of different disciplines and domains—even as they should prepare us for the discovery that the boundaries between these prove permeable once the place of wonder in them is considered more closely. Taken together, they map out a broad horizon against which to seek to bring the experience of wonder into focus, and it is in this larger horizon of questioning in which the papers of this collection can be situated. Let us trace out the main lines of inquiry of the studies that follow.

Focusing the editor's opening paper is a larger question—"what is wonder?"—that takes its point of departure from the relatively elusive and neglected place that wonder has occupied in contemporary research on the emotions. Outlining some of the most familiar analytical approaches to the emotions, it suggests several aspects of wonder that place it in an awkward relationship to such approaches. Having drawn on a broadly Wittgensteinian perspective to propose a general account of wonder, the essay then turns to Daston and Park's reading of wonder's history, which would seem to shed light on this account, supplement it, and potentially contradict it. The key focus falls on a question about the felt experience or affective tone of wonder, and more specifically about its connection to pleasure or delight—a connection that is central to Daston and Park's account of the historicity of wonder and forms the backbone for important questions about its historical identity. Working through this question involves giving closer consideration to Adam Smith's understanding of wonder, and leads to an effort to bring together Daston and Park's historical reading with the one recently articulated by Rubenstein, who, taking us from wonder's beginnings in Plato to Heidegger, calls attention to the darker elements (the dreadful, or the terrible) in wonder and helps further nuance the questions about its affective tone that are central to considering its identity.

A concern with the elusive place of wonder in contemporary emotion research and with questions about the boundaries between concepts of the emotions are also background themes of the paper by Robert Fuller, who argues for the need to consider wonder under its aspect as a biological phenomenon, in the context of a view of emotions as biological systems shaped by natural selection. Wonder, here, is considered as a response to the unfamiliar, and more specifically to what strikes us as intensely powerful, real, or beautiful. Fuller's proposal for locating wonder in an evolutionary framework, though one that still reveals wonder

Practices of Wonder

to be an unintended byproduct rather than an adaptation, focuses on the character of wonder (and awe, to which it is related) as a response to new stimuli that exceed our existing cognitive structures and require us to accommodate them anew to the world. Connected with this character are a variety of functions that can be ascribed to wonder, above all, its tendency to enlarge our field of perception, widen our world of empathy or concern, broaden our cognitive capacities, and—significantly for Fuller’s argument but also for bridging the distance from a naturalistic view of emotions to their cultural context and roles—build higher-order patterns of thought capable of stimulating philosophical and religious reflection. These functions of wonder, in turn, form the core of Fuller’s reading of wonder as an emotion of special importance for the development of spirituality, a reading that he pursues in the context of a larger preoccupation with the value of wonder.

The latter question is likewise a shared theme in the essay by Derek Matravers, which is formed out of the intersection of two main strands of questioning, one concerning the relationship between wonder and cognition, and the other concerning the value we ascribe to wonder. In the background of broader questions about how the relationship between affective and cognitive elements should be written in a philosophical account of the emotions, Matravers considers three approaches for grounding the value of wonder, which respectively refer us to distinct accounts of the relationship of wonder and cognition. Having identified what he takes to be the thought at the heart of wonder—it is provoked by objects profound and impressive with respect to ourselves—he suggests that this should be read in terms of an account of emotions as “cognitively penetrated.” When we believe an object is profound or impressive, we experience it *as* profound or impressive. Yet any judgment we then go on to make concerning the value of wonder would have to take into account, crucially, questions concerning the truth of the beliefs on which the response of wonder is founded.

Sylvana Chrysakopoulou’s essay takes us to the earliest beginnings of philosophy’s preoccupation with wonder, offering a study of wonder in Plato’s works. Passing through a close reading of the *Theaetetus*, this study expands to bring into its scope a richer set of texts that include the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Republic*. Placing these texts into conversation creates an unexpected set of relations, connecting the passion of wonder (*thauma*) to the passion of love (*eros*), which share their suffering quality and orientation to wisdom, and then placing this suffering

quality into relationship with the maieutic metaphor that governs the Socratic art. These connections, in turn, help deliver a re-reading of Platonic wonder as a response to the beautiful—to wisdom under the aspect of its beauty—just as they reveal wonder as the product, not so much of sight, as of insight, that is, as a response to invisible realities perceived with the eyes of the soul. In an understanding articulated in the backdrop of a rich mythical legacy, wonder turns out to provide philosophy, not only with its beginning, but also with its end, understood as an initiation to the mysteries beheld by the soul in its prenatal existence. As Chrysakopoulou shows, this understanding betrays strong debts to pre-Socratic philosophical texts, as also to the Homeric literary tradition. At the same time, and significantly, these debts reveal groundbreaking revisions, particularly in the Platonic construal of the response to wisdom in passionate terms, and in the rewriting of the heroic character in terms of a philosophical ideal.

Turning from these earliest beginnings of philosophical wonder to some of its more recent episodes, Stephen Mulhall focuses on Heidegger and Wittgenstein, two twentieth-century philosophers who have exhibited particular concern with the governing mood of philosophical inquiry. Having identified bewilderment or perplexity as the inflection of this mood that both philosophers share, he considers the question whether this is a condition that inquiry is understood as transcending. With Heidegger—whose question about Being, in *Being and Time*, invites a perplexity that seems to endure unpurged at the close of inquiry—this mood is one whose enduring character, Mulhall suggests, is tied to the fact that it mirrors (or is attuned to) fundamental aspects of Being; of the discourse of philosophy that thematizes it; and of human being, internally related to mystery by being related at every moment to that which makes no sense—namely, the possibility of non-being. This inevitability reiterates itself, though in different terms, in Wittgenstein, who preoccupied himself intensely with our seemingly inveterate tendency to remove ourselves from our linguistic home, and to be “bewitched” into an exile—an exile to metaphysical uses of words that is a state of nonsense—that leaves us bewildered. Addressing the notion of the sublime as it figures in Wittgenstein’s critique of this habit of linguistic self-exile, Mulhall explores a specific instance of our subliming tendency—the idea that demonstratives are the only true names—by placing it in two mythological contexts, Wagnerian and Socratic, which suggest the reflection that if there is a true sublime, it is to be found in the creativity of language. The way we continue to sublime even those tools

Practices of Wonder

deployed against our subliming tendency, however, suggests that this is a self-exile of perplexity in which we are fated to dwell.

It is in the same shadow, of a question about wonder as a dwelling and abode, that Mary-Jane Rubenstein's essay is written, now focusing on Heidegger more narrowly and drawing on a number of later Heideggerian texts in which wonder comes up for more systematic discussion. At the same time, it is written in another and rather longer shadow, that of Heidegger's disastrous political decisions: were these, perhaps, the result of an excess of star-struck wonder? This provides the setting for asking whether wonder is a location in which we should (and could) dwell, which in turn involves asking what wonder is (or should be). As articulated elusively in Heidegger's later writings, what stands out in his conception of wonder is its feeling tone and its objects—the tone of shock and awe that characterizes the attunement of wonder, not to the new and unfamiliar, but to that which is most ordinary and familiar: the “that” of being, *that beings are*, which is presupposed in everything we do and say. Passing through a study of Heidegger's developing readings of Plato's allegory of the cave, one closely connected to his developing views of the notion of truth, what emerges is an understanding of Heidegger's political choices as a failure to assimilate his own insights about the occurrence of truth and the nature of wonder. For wonder does not dwell in the extraordinary—above the clouds—but in the extraordinary seen through the ordinary, in the space between the everyday and the clouds—suggesting, likewise, that talk of wonder as a “dwelling” should not obscure the fact that wonder constantly needs to be reconquered through the dialectic that generates it.

A concern with the ordinary as an object of wonder plays a similarly governing rôle in the paper by Olivier Doron, which studies the place of wonder in the scientific work of microscopists in early modern science, in the period from the end of the seventeenth century until at least the middle of the eighteenth, among whom the microscope became a means—in the stronger sense of a technical instrument—for the cultivation of wonder at ordinary things transfigured into marvels under the lens. This programmatic courting of wonder, Doron argues, needs to be situated in an understanding of science that would align it with the notion of a spiritual practice, one that aims not merely at truth, but at wisdom, and aims at a radical self-transformation that, in the case of these scientists, can be specified in ethical and religious terms. To see the glory in the fly: this spiritualized idiom, which echoes similar *topoi* among the poets of the broader Romantic movement (Wordsworth: the “splendor in the

grass” and the “glory in the flower”), invites us to perceive a wondrousness that returns to God as a token of His glory. As Doron’s account shows, the notion of science revealed in this practice of wonder stands at the seams of changing conceptions of scientific inquiry—including the place of objectivity among its intellectual virtues—and of its key terms, such as the notion of experience and fact, and the means capable of producing the latter.

The essay by Alexander Rueger emerges from the same historical background as the one that provides this scientific episode with its roots, at a time when, as Daston and Park have suggested, changes in scientific notions found their reflection in changes in aesthetic sensibility, and when aesthetic standards were in flux in more ways than one. Rueger’s concern, in this period of shifting standards, is with the seventeenth- to eighteenth-century literary critical debates about the place of wonder or the marvelous in literature and about its legitimacy as an artistic tool. The relationship of wonder to the traditional rhetorical framework, and particularly the notion of literary decorum to which art had to answer, had already been marked by important tensions. But the adoption of wonder as the headline of an aesthetic ideal by Baroque art theorists—one that went hand in hand with an emphasis on the poet’s ingenuity with formal devices—provoked a heightened tension with the Neoclassicist literary canon that, on Rueger’s account, set the stage for the seminal translation by Boileau of Longinus’ treatise on the sublime, in a move that looked back to ancient rhetorical resources to establish a form of wonder that could take over from the marvelous as a legitimate literary heir. These debates, and the reformulated notion of the sublime they injected into literary discourse, played a crucial role in the emergence of the notion of aesthetic experience in the eighteenth century, and in the emergence of a new mode of experiencing nature, as an object of awed wonder that was provoked by the terrible, the vast, and the disordered.

Michel Hulin’s concern, located in a rather different context than the one that situates the other studies, is with the notion of wonder in Indian aesthetics, developing from the fourth and fifth centuries CE onward from an initially dramaturgical focus into a larger theory of aesthetics. Wonder plays a central role in this theory, particularly in accounting for the aesthetic pleasure that works of art afford us. More specifically, it is involved in the transfiguration or sublimation of ordinary emotions into their aesthetic counterparts, and in conferring to our aesthetic reactions the “as-if” quality that removes their practical tendency. Wonder, in this account, marks the dissociation from the individual egoistic perspective

Practices of Wonder

to a supra-individual level on which our sole identity is that of conscious beings capable of wondering who are, as such, free, and above the suffering caused by the egoistic perspective of the individual, and who use their freedom for the embrace of universal necessity. And while this account may be anchored in a very different context from the previous studies, its terms might evoke several affinities with views of aesthetic experience familiar to readers of Western philosophical texts. Not only in construing the aesthetic moment in terms of a transcendence of the perspective of practical, egoistic interest (as Kant, most notably, understood it), but also in involving a discovery of freedom that may remind us both of Kant's notion of the rational embrace of moral law, but also, and perhaps more strikingly, of Schopenhauer's understanding of aesthetic experience as an ascent to the supra-individual that offers reprieve from the suffering caused by the will.

David Burrell, in his contribution, takes his point of departure from Charles Taylor's recent analysis of the secular age, cast in terms of the emergence of a self-sufficient humanism productive of social imaginaries that disembody society from the cosmos and reject inherent hierarchies, involve a transformed conception of uniform and controllable time, and exclude notions of an outside source for the reception of power such as characterize an authentically religious outlook. Responding to the Hegel-like inevitability that this account seems to import, Burrell turns to Taylor's account of "conversions" to develop it as a way out of this seeming "iron cage"—the "outside" of a conversion that is glossed as a form of wonder—taking as his focus the diaries of Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish woman in Holland during German occupation, and examining the expressions of her spiritual awakening. This spiritual awakening, issuing in the face of the greatest odds with no "because" and many "despites," emerges as a developing sense of wonder before life and the world. For all its apparent spontaneity, it is an awakening to wonder that, Burrell suggests, is structured by the grammar made available by religious tradition even as it enriches itself with the grammar of traditions other than her own.

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