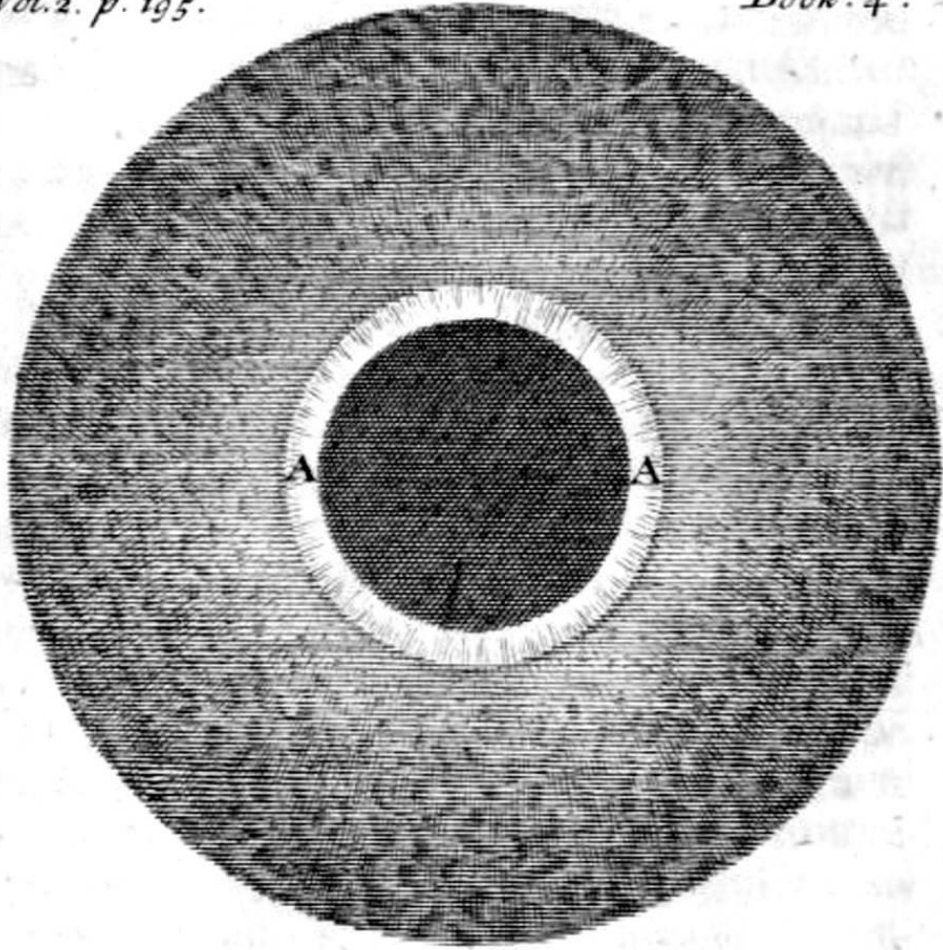


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ATTENTION AND THE SUBLIME

FRIENDS OF ATTENTION FIRST FRIDAY
FEBRUARY 7, 2025

PARADOX OF THE SUBLIME

Aesthetic response to nature first discussed (or experienced?) around the turn of the eighteenth century.

An encounter with vast, terrifying, overwhelming nature simultaneously evokes –

- * a sense of smallness and insignificance**
- * a feeling of elevation and enlargement of the mind**



“The Monk by the Sea”

**Caspar David Friedrich,
1808–10**

ATTENTIONAL DYNAMICS

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804):

“This movement (especially in its inception) may be compared to a vibration, i.e., to a rapidly alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object.”

What makes the sublime phenomenon so alluring, despite—or perhaps because of—its resistance to comprehension?

EXPLAINING THE PARADOX

Kant: Unable to comprehend the sublime, the mind turns inward and finds elevation in its own infinity, seeing itself as greater than anything physical.

Alternative explanation: The feeling of elevation arises when a mind gives up comprehension and shares in the world's vastness.

FIRST PROMPT

Recall a time you experienced “the sublime.”

Where and when was it?

How would you describe your own attention in that instance?

SECOND PROMPT

How would you go about conveying your experience of the “sublime”?

(Making words? Images? Artifacts? Or guiding others into the presence of the same phenomenon? What might each approach reveal or fail to capture?)