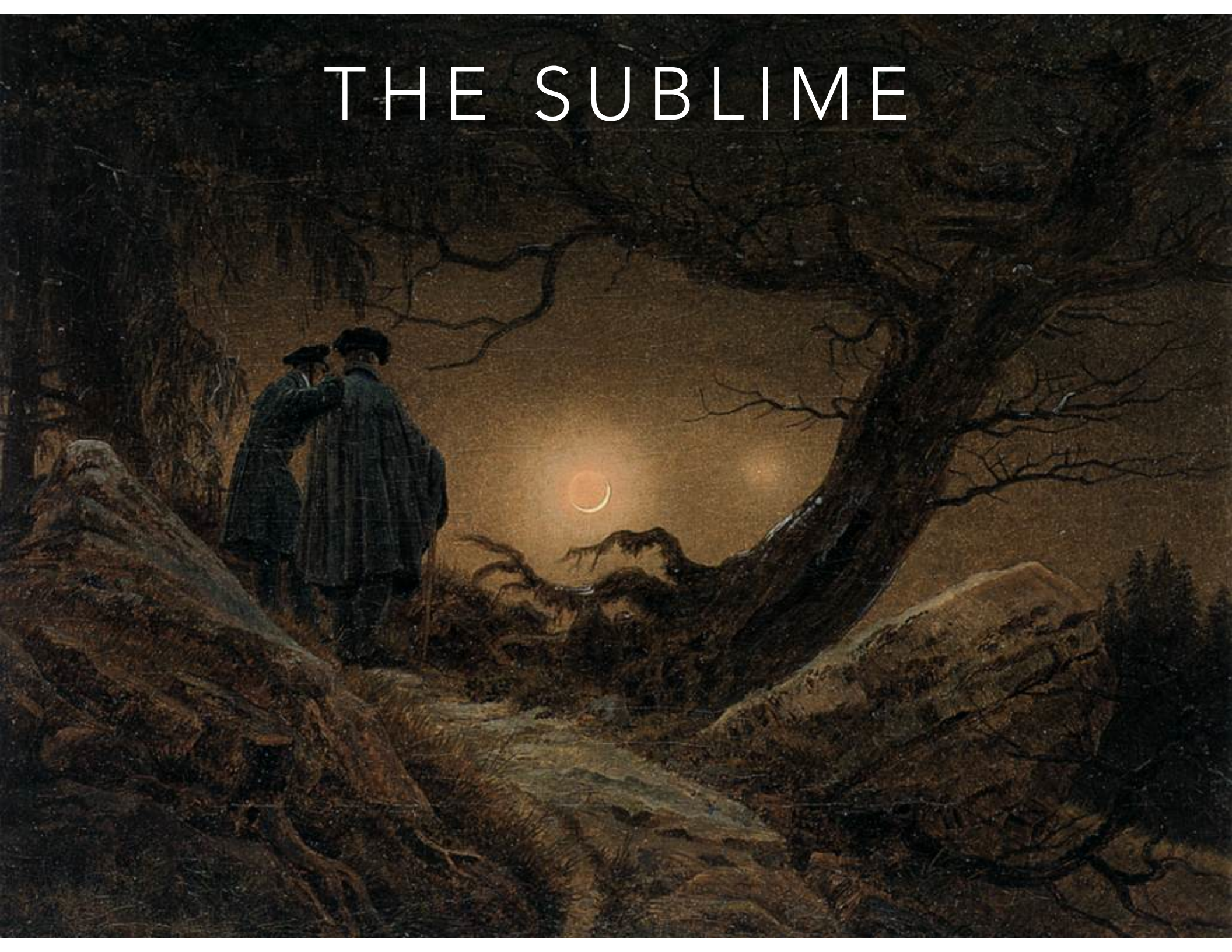


# THE SUBLIME



"Were there ever any codes of law written in  
poetry?"

- 242 STUDENT, CA. 2008

# LAWS WRITTEN IN POETRY

- The Code of Hammurabi, the earliest known written code of laws in the West (1795 BCE), is written in alternating prose and poetry
- The Manusmṛiti, also known as the Laws of Manu, is in poetry and lays down important laws in Hinduism
- The Solonian constitution, the code of laws in ancient Greece, was written in poetry
- The Twelve Tablets, the Roman code of law, was written in poetry (a somewhat babyish, Dr. Seussian form of Latin poetry)
- In short, it was typical to express laws in poetic form in the ancient world, both civil (Hammurabi) and religious (Manusmṛiti). It is still common today to express moral maxims in poetic form ("an apple a day," "early to bed," etc.)

# BURKE: THE SUBLIME

- A cliff, a chasm, ruins
- It is in the thing, but also *in us*
- It has certain qualities:
  - large
  - obscure
  - powerful, terrifying
  - craggy, disjointed
  - overwhelming
- It is, in short, *masculine* (Romantic)









# KANT: THE SUBLIME

- The sublime is beyond us
- It has certain qualities:
  - our imagination can't understand it...
  - but our intellect can.
  - the mismatch of imagination and intellect is the experience of the sublime
- The sublime is effectively a triumph *of* the intellect for Kant
- The sublime is a triumph *over* the intellect for Burke



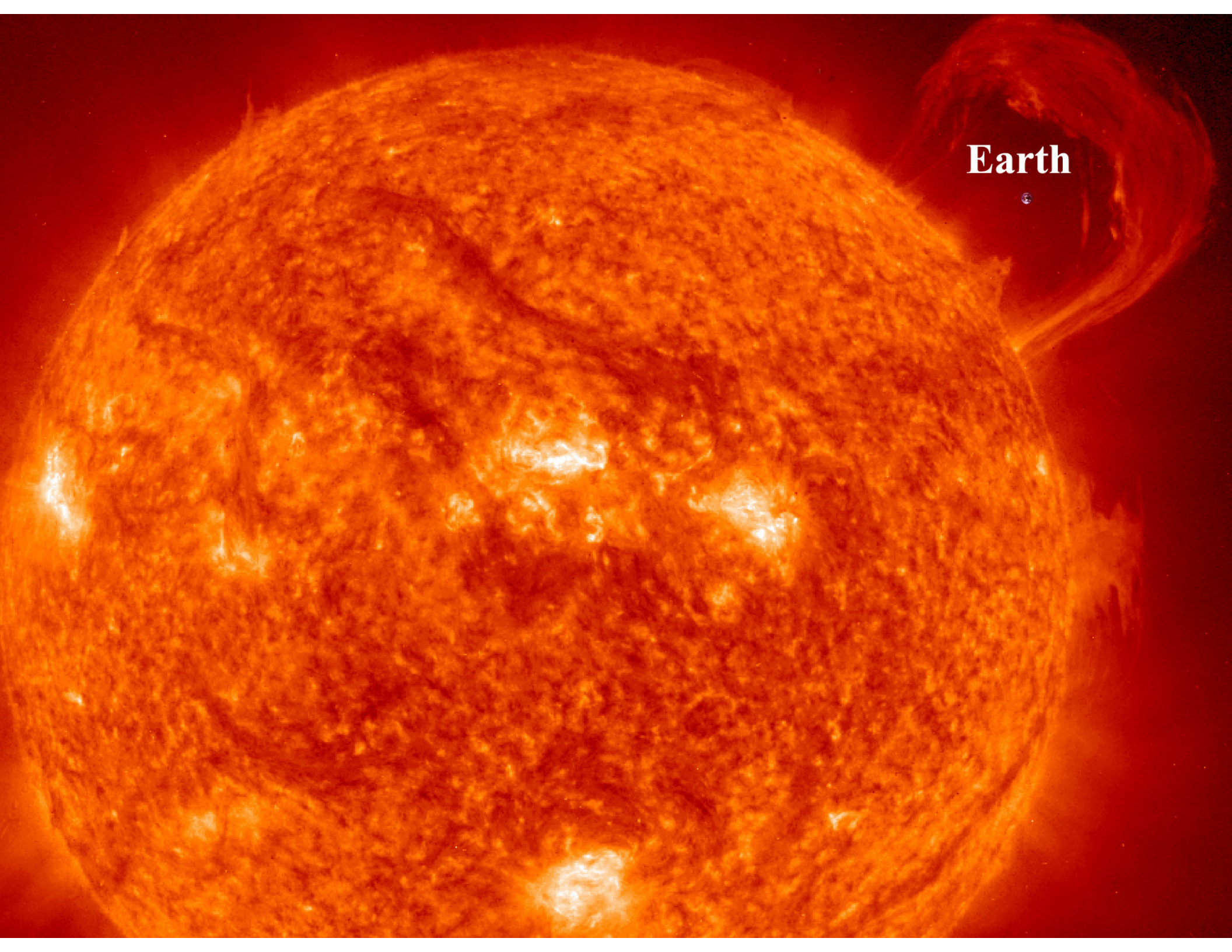




NO  
PASSING  
ZONE



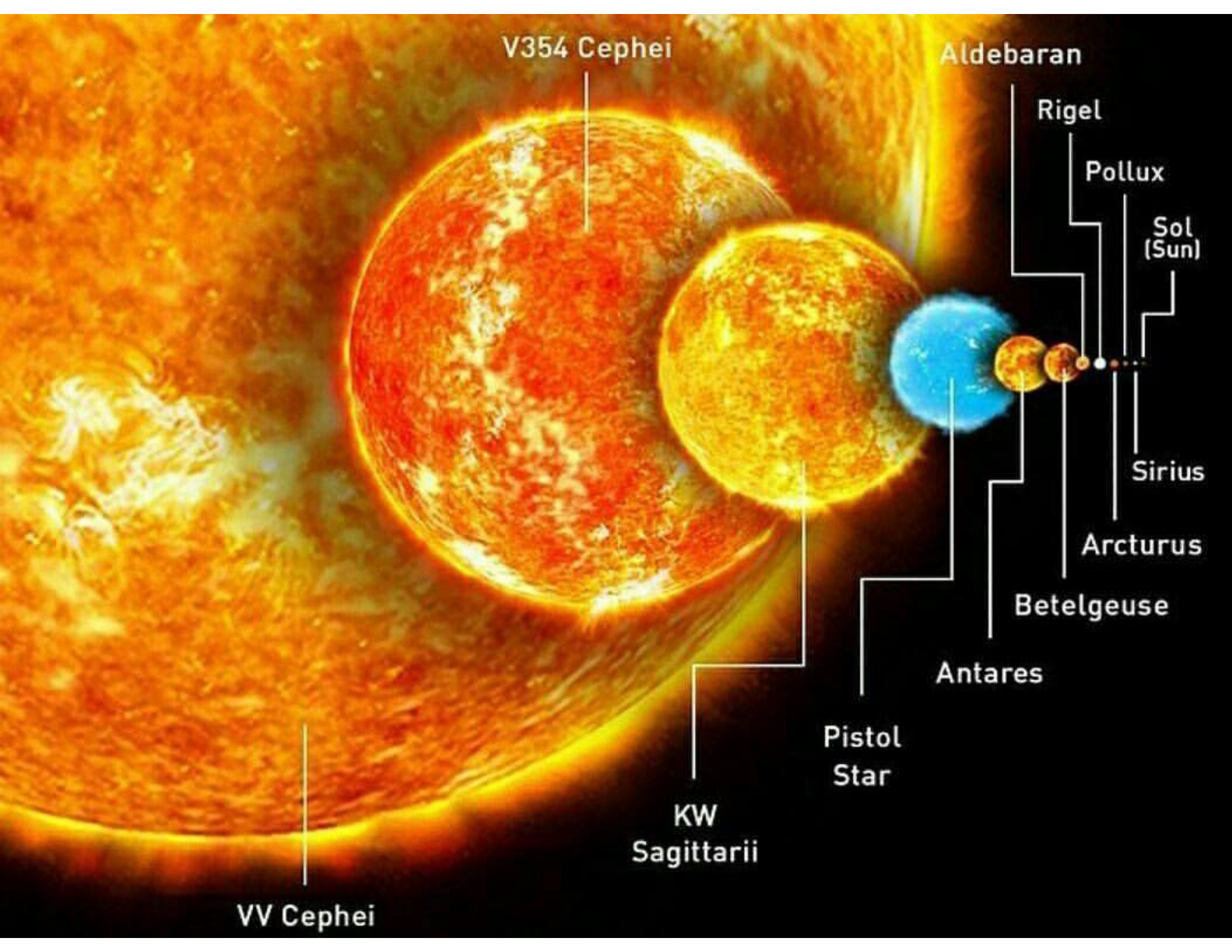




**Earth**

A composite image showing the Sun on the left and the Earth on the right. The Sun is a large, bright orange and yellow sphere with a textured surface. The Earth is a smaller, blue and white sphere. The word "Earth" is written in a white serif font over the Earth image.

**Earth**



V354 Cephei

Aldebaran

Rigel

Pollux

Sol (Sun)

Sirius

Arcturus

Betelgeuse

Antares

Pistol Star

KW Sagittarii

VV Cephei

# INFINITY

- Remember Kant says that the sublime is produced when we can understand something (our whole planet is tiny when put next to the sun), but we can't really imagine it or grasp its totality with our senses
- This is especially true for size or magnitude
- So, let's talk about infinity



# INFINITY

- Here's the thing: you have no "intuition" of infinity, even though you sort of understand it. What is infinity -1? Infinity +1?
- "Counting" numbers  $\{1, 2, 3, 4, \dots\}$  are infinite
- Even numbers  $\{2, 4, 6, 8, \dots\}$  are also infinite
- "Same size" means I can pair each item in set 1 with set 2
- Here's something funny: just as many even numbers as counting numbers, although even numbers are included in them!
- Pair  $2:1, 4:2, 6:3, 8:4, \dots (2n:n)$ ; all match, no "leftovers"







# INFINITY 2.0

- Irrational numbers are decimals that go on forever, no repeats
- $\pi = 3.1415926535897932384\dots$
- Let's list the irrationals between 1 and 2!
- It turns out there are *infinitely* many of them  $\{i_1, i_2, i_3, i_4\dots\}$  (This is actually intuitive, if you think about it for a while)
- Start pairing:  $i_1:1, i_2:2, i_3:3, i_4:4\dots$
- But we've used up *all our counting numbers*—an infinitely large set of numbers—just for the irrationals between 1 and 2!
- Irrational numbers are a *bigger infinity* than counting numbers





# INFINITY 3.0...

- With a much longer demonstration, we can prove something even more shocking about infinity—it gets bigger
- <http://skullsinthestars.com/2013/11/14/infinity-is-weird-how-big-is-infinity/>
- This four part series that demonstrates, in language non-math people can understand (if a bit slowly) that there are actually...
- ...an *infinite number of ever-larger sizes of infinity*





FROM THE RIDICULOUS  
TO THE SUBLIME

LEOPARDI, "THE INFINITE"

# LEOPARDI: L'INFINITO

Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle  
E questa siepe che da tanta parte  
dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.  
Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati  
spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani  
silenzi, e profondissima quiete  
io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco  
il cor non si spaura. E come il vento  
odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello  
infinito silenzio a questa voce  
vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,  
e le morte stagioni, e la presente  
e viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa  
immensità s'annega il pensier mio:  
e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.



# LEOPARDI: THE INFINITE

It was always dear to me, this solitary hill,  
and this hedgerow here, that closes off my view,  
from so much of the ultimate horizon.

But sitting here, and watching here,  
in thought, I create interminable spaces,  
greater than human silences, and deepest  
quiet, where the heart barely fails to terrify.

When I hear the wind, blowing among these leaves,  
I go on to compare that infinite silence  
with this voice, and I remember the eternal  
and the dead seasons, and the living present,  
and its sound, so that in this immensity  
my thoughts are drowned, and shipwreck  
seems sweet to me in this sea.

# LEOPARDI

- Life
- The outside, replicated inside
- Burke's qualities
  - infinitely large
  - obscure, incomprehensible
  - provokes fear
  - overwhelming ("shipwreck of thought")
- Why? (masochistic romanticism)
- Formal analysis of the poem





# LEOPARDI: L'INFINITO

1 Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle  
2 E questa siepe che da tanta parte  
3 dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude.  
4 Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati  
5 spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani  
6 silenzi, e profondissima quiete  
7 io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco  
8 il cor non si spaura. E come il vento  
9 odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello  
10 infinito silenzio a questa voce  
11 vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno,  
12 e le morte stagioni, e la presente  
13 e viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa  
14 immensità s'annega il pensier mio:  
15 e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.

"fu" is  
a weird choice  
a remote past with  
no connection to present

It is a 15 line  
poem, hence  
not a

sonnet. Or  
way? in some

# LEOPARDI: THE INFINITE

1 It was always dear to me, this solitary hill,  
2 and this hedgerow here, that closes off my view,  
3 from so much of the ultimate horizon.

4 But sitting here, and watching here,  
5 in thought, I create interminable spaces,  
6 greater than human silences, and deepest  
7 quiet, where the heart barely fails to terrify.

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9 I go on to compare that infinite silence

10 with this voice, and I remember the eternal  
11 and the dead seasons, and the living present,  
12 and its sound, so that in this immensity

13 my thoughts are drowned, and shipwreck

14 seems sweet to me in this sea.

external blockage  
creates space  
sublime is transhuman  
internal

the distant/outside  
becomes internal  
and near

English  
makes it a  
sonnet.

COLERIDGE, "KUBLAI KHAN"

# COLERIDGE: "KUBLA KHAN"

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree:

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran

Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea.

So twice five miles of fertile ground

With walls and towers were girdled round:

And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills

Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;

And here were forests ancient as the hills,

Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted

Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!

A savage place! as holy and enchanted

As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted

By woman wailing for her demon-lover!

# COLERIDGE: "KUBLAI KHAN"

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced;  
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:  
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.  
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion  
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,  
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:  
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!



# COLERIDGE: "KUBLAI KHAN"

The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
Floated midway on the waves:  
Where was heard the mingled measure  
From the fountain and the caves.  
It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer  
In a vision once I saw:  
It was an Abyssinian maid,  
And on her dulcimer she played,  
Singing of Mount Abora.

# COLERIDGE: "KUBLAI KHAN"

Could I revive within me  
Her symphony and song,  
To such a deep delight 'twould win me  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!  
And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

# COLERIDGE

- Formal Analysis
- Oppositions
  - Beautiful vs. sublime
    - "stately... decree"
    - "measureless... sunless sea"
  - geometry v. the irregular
    - "twice 5 miles... girdled round"
    - "chasm... slanted... burst... mazy"
  - Khan's order v. natural world
- Confusion as a positive value (negative capability)
- from Alph to Alpha
- The figure of the poet (maker)



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Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!

A savage place! as holy and enchanted

As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted

By woman wailing for her demon-lover!

sublime =  
obscure,  
infinite

beauty =  
geometry,  
measure,  
order

sublime =  
the bent  
angle, the  
slant, the  
curve  
(a perversion  
of order)

# COLERIDGE: "KUBLAI KHAN"

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced;  
Amid whose swift half-intermittent burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:  
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.  
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion  
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,  
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:  
And 'mid this tumult Kublai heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

turmoil is  
also politics

body reacts  
without  
orgasm  
mundi

disorder

anti-geometry

turmoil, tumult,  
war; the opposite  
of "realms of gold"

# COLERIDGE: "KUBLAI KHAN"

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Floated midway on the waves:

Where was heard the mingled measure

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It was a miracle of rare device,

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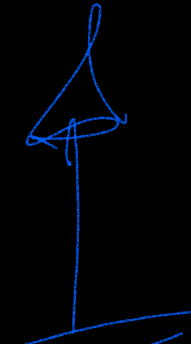
And on her dulcimer she played,

Singing of Mount Abora.

A new section  
begins here;  
interlude of beauty;  
bridge of a song

# COLERIDGE: "KUBLAI KHAN"

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Her symphony and song,  
To such a deep delight 'twould win me  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
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And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise.



"sang out loud and bold"  
Poet's experience  
of sublime cataclysm  
inspires a divine  
song of creation  
(poesis); this figure  
is magical, and figure  
contained only  
by ritual

SHELLEY, "OZYMANDIAS"



# SHELLEY: "OZYMANDIAS"

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: —Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown  
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command!  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed.  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!"  
Nothing beside remains: round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

# SHELLEY

- Keats v. Shelley
  - Keats: art is eternal but sterile
  - Shelley: art seems eternal, but next to infinity, is ironic & sublime
- Sublime fragmentation
  - "vast... trunkless legs of stone"
  - "half sunk... shattered visage"
  - "boundless and bare" desert broken up by the statue
  - "colossal wreck"
- Meanings:
  - Moral: pride goeth before the fall
  - Artistic: *verba volant, scripta manent*
  - Romantic: ruins produce poetry
  - Political: power is transient (*Breaking Bad*)



# SHELLEY: "OZYMANDIAS"

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The lone and level sands stretch far away.

*rhythmically  
regular*  
*meter  
fragments*

A  
B  
A  
B  
A  
C  
D  
C  
E  
D  
E  
F  
E  
F















