This presentation examines how the idea of sublimity is invoked to address certain socio-cultural themes (e.g., secularization, war, the decline of the aristocracy), thereby revealing its extra-aesthetic significance and critical vocation. The works of Kant, *The Critique of Judgment* and Stendhal, *The Red and the Black* are adduced to show how this little-noticed fusion of aesthetic reflection with cultural critique is actually an essential feature of the modern concept of sublimity.