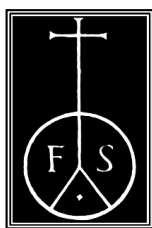


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THE PLACE OF THE SUBLIME IN KANT'S PROJECT

ROBERT R. CLEWIS

The concept of freedom is the stumbling block for all empiricists, but also the key to the most sublime practical principles for critical moralists.

(*KpV*, AA v 7)¹

1. INTRODUCTION

THIS article attempts to understand the place of the sublime in Kant's project. It argues that Kant's account of the sublime is in fact no mere appendix to Kant's discussion in the *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, but rather can be seen as helping to fulfill one of its main aims, namely, to explain how the 'gap' between nature and freedom, or between theoretical and moral philosophy, can be bridged. What is meant by this problem – which Kant himself created and addressed – will be explained below. In showing the role of the sublime, I draw upon Kant's analysis of beauty as a symbol of morality and argue that the sublime may equally count as such a symbol. I argue for three additional claims.

1. Because for Kant the sublime is a 'feeling' or 'experience' of freedom, it can provide a sensible indication that humans are free, belief in which Kant considers a necessary condition of moral action.
2. By sharing a structure with the moral feeling of respect, the sublime, for Kant, can help humans be motivated to be moral.
3. Even if the sublime is a feeling of 'independence' from nature (a capacity to set ends), it can function as a sign of nature's harmony with the ends of morality, which in Kant's project is the most important ('final') end.

I implicitly draw from the third *Critique's* discussion of the 'intellectual interest' in natural beauty, arguing that the sublime also constitutes a case in which nature appears to show itself as 'amenable' to our purposes (meaning that nature appears to be in harmony with them, or at least appears not to get in the way of our moral strivings), and thus may give us agents hope that our moral purposes can actually be realized in the natural realm.

Remaining close to the texts, I offer an 'orthodox' reading of Kantian sublimity, to contribute to a more unified understanding of Kant's philosophy. Rather than trying to modify Kant's theory or create a better theory of the sublime² – which I never-

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, English quotations will be from the Cambridge edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992-).

² See for example the debate between those who question the possibility of a theory of the sublime (Forsey, Sircello) and responses to it (Deligiorgi): J. FORSEY, *Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?*, «The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism», LXV, 2007, pp. 381-389; G. SIRCELLO, *How Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?*, «The

theless consider to be important and interesting – I characterize Kant's theory on its own terms, to see how it fits into his larger project. One outcome of my reading, however, will be to cast doubt on the reading that the Kantian sublime is merely 'subjectivist' or self-aggrandizing, for I will insist on the important role of the natural *object* in the experience of sublimity.

How does this fit into recent scholarship on the topic? Henry Allison¹ notes that in the third *Critique*, the beautiful, not the sublime, predominates because it involves a more direct connection with the 'purposiveness of nature', the 'transcendental principle of reflective judgment'.² I do not dispute this. Allison admits, again correctly I think, that this predominance does *not* imply that the governing idea of purposiveness stands in no connection with the sublime whatsoever.³ However, his position emphasizes the *tension* between the sublime and the underlying concept of the purposiveness of nature, whereas I emphasize the harmony between these two: the sublime, one could say after Kant, is purposive through its contrapurposiveness. But I see this more as a difference of emphasis than a serious disagreement, I should add.

Allison concludes that the purposiveness of nature with respect to this feeling is at best indirect, since it consists in nothing more than showing us to be autonomous moral agents and hinting at our independence from nature. Seeming to support his view, indeed, is this key passage, where Kant calls the theory of the sublime a «mere appendix to the aesthetic judging of the purposiveness of nature»:

But in that which we are accustomed to call sublime in nature there is so little that leads to particular objective principles... From this we see that the concept of the sublime in nature is far from being as important and rich in consequences as that of its beauty, and that in general it indicates nothing purposive in nature itself, but only in the possible use of intuitions to make palpable in ourselves a purposiveness that is entirely independent of nature. For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground outside ourselves, but for the sublime merely one in ourselves and in the way of thinking that introduces sublimity into the representation of the former.

(KU, AA v 246)

Yet if one places the emphasis where Allison does, one risks overlooking the following: 1. a crucial implication of Kant's theory of the 'subreption' (explained below), viz., that in committing a 'subreption' in the judgment of sublimity we see the natural *object* as sublime, and 2. the sublime's capacity to 'symbolize' morality. On my

Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism», LI, 1993, pp. 541-550; K. DELIGIORGI, *The Pleasures of Contra-purposiveness: Kant, the Sublime, and Being Human*, «The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism», LXXII, 2014, pp. 25-35. Consider also the attempts to apply the sublime to theories of fine art (Vandenabeele, Gracyk): B. VANDENABEELE, *The Sublime in Art: Kant, the Mannerist and the Matterist Sublime*, «Journal of Aesthetic Education», XLIX, 2015, pp. 32-49; TH. GRACYK, *The Sublime and the Fine Arts*, in *The Sublime: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. by T. Costelloe, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 217-229.

¹ H. E. ALLISON, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

² Kant defines 'purposiveness of form' (*Zweckmäßigkeit der Form*) as the «correspondence of a thing with that constitution of things that is possible only in accordance with ends». An end (*Zweck*) is «the concept of an object insofar as it at the same time contains the ground of the reality of this object» (KU, AA v 180). In finding a natural object to be beautiful or sublime, our *experience* of the object is purposive even though we do not think of the object as actually having been designed for a purpose; see P. GUYER, *Kant*, New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 356.

³ H. E. ALLISON, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, p. 344.

reading, Kant is committed to the claim that the sublime in nature¹ can play a more robust role in providing a sensible hint of the harmony between nature and freedom. I suggest that the sublime in nature can be an ally of freedom in ways Kant did not himself spell out. (My conclusion nonetheless insists that the role played by the sublime remains 'indirect'.)

In section two, I explain more precisely what is meant by the 'transition problem' and why it is a problem. I explain Kant's account of sublimity (section three), not in order to give an exhaustive account of the sublime, but to relate it to the transition problem and Kant's aims in the third *Critique*. In section four, I explain how the sublime can represent morality in a way analogous to beauty's symbolization of morality. Before concluding, in section five I explain three ways the sublime can be said to contribute to the transition from nature to freedom.²

2. «TRANSITION TO THE DOMAIN OF THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM»

What is meant by the above phrase? Following Henry Allison and Paul Guyer,³ I conceive of the transition problem as the problem of how to promote in the natural order the ends of freedom as dictated by the moral law.⁴ In Kant's terms: how can agents instantiate the 'laws of freedom' (promote moral ends) in the natural order? It is the problem of bridging an «immense gulf» between what happens according to the laws of nature and what ought to happen according to laws of freedom (*KU*, AA v 175). To paraphrase Allison, the laws of nature stemming from the understanding determine what is the case (cf. *KrV*, A 189 B 232; A 532-534 B 560-562) and the laws of freedom derived from reason dictate what ought to be. (This is a key part of what it means for reason to be 'superior' to nature, which will be important later, and is not meant in a self-aggrandizing sense). These two orders must be viewed as being compatible without one being reducible to the other, that is, without forming a single domain. The problem is to understand how the laws of nature, which govern what does happen, can accommodate morality's demands regarding what ought to happen.⁵ In Kant's project, the realm of freedom is supposed to have an influence on the realm of nature; the concept of freedom is supposed to actualize in the world of sense the pur-

¹ I leave aside sublimity elicited by art and artifact, though there is a debate about whether artistic sublimity is possible given Kant's account (with Henry Allison, me, and Bart Vandenabeele, holding it is possible, and Uygur Abaci, Emily Brady, and Paul Guyer tending to deny this). While my own view is that it is possible, I cannot defend that here, but do not consider it necessary to my argument.

² My account agrees with some recent studies of Kantian sublimity. Emily Brady, in *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013) reasserts «the centrality of natural objects and phenomena to his [Kant's] theory» (p. 6). Paul Guyer, Serena Feloj, I, Donald Loose, and Herman van Erp argue that aesthetic feelings and judgments can provide hints that we are free and therefore help resolve the transition problem. See P. GUYER, *Symbols of Freedom in Kant's Aesthetics*, in IDEM, *Values of Beauty: Historical Essays in Aesthetics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 222-241; S. FELOJ, *Il sublime nel pensiero di Kant*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2012, p. 11; R. LEWIS, *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 7-19. Finally, the chapters by Herman van Erp and Donald Loose, in *The Sublime and Its Teleology*, ed. by D. Loose, Leiden, Brill, 2011 provide useful discussions of the sublime in relation to Kant's teleology of nature and are broadly consistent with the present interpretation.

³ H. E. ALLISON, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, pp. 201-206. Guyer has published on this in numerous places, e.g., P. GUYER, *Kant*, esp. pp. 358 ff. and 375 ff.

⁴ I remain within the Kantian philosophy here; this is not the place to examine the arguments for and against Kant's ethical theory.

⁵ H. E. ALLISON, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, p. 202.

pose enjoined by its laws (*KU*, AA v 176). So the question arises: are the ends dictated by the «laws of freedom» (morality)¹ realizable in the sensible world, that is, in the empirical order of nature? I take this to be the point underlying the rather dense quote from Section IX:

The effect in accordance with the concept of freedom is the final end, which (or its appearance in the sensible world) should exist, for which the condition of its possibility in nature (in the nature of the subject as a sensible being, that is, as a human being) is presupposed. That which presupposes this a priori and without regard to the practical, namely, the power of judgment, provides the mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical, from lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter, in the concept of a purposiveness of nature; for thereby is the possibility of the final end, which can become actual only in nature and in accord with its laws, cognized... And thus the power of judgment makes possible the transition from the domain of the concept of nature to that of the concept of freedom.

(*KU*, AA v 196; my emphasis)

A few lines later, putting some pressure on the standard interpretation that downplays the role of the sublime, Kant refers to «aesthetic judgment on certain objects (of nature or of art)» and to the feelings of pleasure and *displeasure*, which, since the sublime involves a unique kind of displeasure, could be taken as a reference to sublimity (*KU*, AA v 197).

Now, at this point one might wonder what the ‘ends’ are here. As Allison notes, the final, moral ends to be pursued are the ethical ends of one’s own perfection and of the happiness of others; civil society under a republican constitution; a condition of perpetual peace between states; and the requirement to work for the advancement of the highest good on earth, which is best seen as a ‘totalizing concept’ encompassing all universally valid ends.²

The ‘transition problem’ is a problem because, although the first *Critique’s* discussion in the third Antinomy has, Kant thinks, given us a theoretical solution to the problem of freedom, there is still the threat or specter that the laws of freedom might not actually be achievable by agents. What, precisely, is getting in the way? Presumably Kant could have in mind cases where an agent intends to fulfill some ethical duty, yet the attempt is frustrated by unforeseen or unintended events or facts.³ However, above all, it is nature in the form of *human* nature that is the greatest obstacle: we are the problem. (Kant calls this «inner» nature; see also the text in italics in the block quote above). Allison’s interpretation is again instructive, noting that Kant holds that the passions of ambition, lust for power, and greed, particularly on the part of rulers, make war inevitable and therefore appear to stand in the way of the attainment of the morally required end of perpetual peace (*KU*, AA v 432-423). In the published *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) Kant takes account of the

¹ The realm of freedom, for Kant, is not lawless but is governed by the moral law, which autonomous agents give themselves.

² H. E. ALLISON, *Kant’s Theory of Taste*, p. 203.

³ A small example, concerning the duty to promote the happiness of others: I give my neighbor something to eat containing nuts only to realize or learn, too late, that he has a nut allergy and that I have caused harm rather than promoted his happiness. The ‘facts of nature’ seem decidedly not to have been on my side in such a case.

desire for vengeance and the manias for honor, domination, and possession, all of which work contrary to the ends of pure practical reason (*Anth*, AA VII 270-274), especially the moral-political ends concerning justice and peace. These are concrete sources of the problem which the sublime is to help resolve in the ways to be explained.

Criticisms of the divide between nature and freedom that Kant had created have a long history; I briefly mention Hegel as a representative speculative philosopher.¹ According to what Hegel calls the «moral worldview»,² human freedom is postulated in opposition to nature, and nature and freedom are seen as two independent and subsistent realms of reality. Hegel is surely aiming at Kant.³ Note, in contrast, that our problem does not concern speculative metaphysics; it is not a «speculative» problem, as it later became for some of Kant's idealistic successors, as Allison notices.⁴ Moreover, our problem also does not concern an account of a possible metaphysics whereby supersensible freedom could actually intervene in the causally determined, sensible world. The proposed 'solution' does not solve any metaphysical or theoretical question concerning the coherence of Kant's view, or how freedom really could have transformative influence in the sensible world; rather, following the third *Critique's* Second Introduction, the problem concerns practical agency.⁵

If that is the problem, what is (part of) the solution, proposed below? It is too early to give a full answer, but at this point I can say the following. Kant does not think that nature is actually, in itself, constituted such that it will support the ends of morality. (We don't know how nature is in itself.) But if we are to have the achievement of moral ends as our goal, we have to think that it is possible to do so in the natural order. As Allison notes, it is not that success must be guaranteed, but merely that it not be precluded; for one cannot rationally act in pursuit of an end, the promotion of which is taken to be impossible; since the arena in which these ends are to be realized or promoted is the sensible world, it follows that a moral agent must presuppose a certain 'amenability of nature' and its lawful order to our moral project.⁶ In order to pursue rationally the ends dictated by morality, the agent, from a practical point of view must conceive of nature as amenable to the realization of moral requirements. Otherwise, the agent could very well reject morality as a mere pipe dream or figment of the imagination. Now, does nature give any indication at all that it is on our side? Yes: in the purposive forms of natural beauties, as well as (more controversially) in the 'contrapurposive' forms of sublimity – the craggy mountains, raging storms, vast

¹ For instance, in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel charges that the Kantian will is opposed to outer nature and inner nature, or the sensible: G. W. F. HEGEL, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie III, Werke*, vol. 20, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1971, p. 370. In the «Addition to Section 124» in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel alleges, more vividly, that «the laurels of mere willing are dry leaves, which have never been green» (G. W. F. HEGEL, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by S. Dyde, New York, Cosimo, 2008, p. 53).

² For the *moralische Weltanschauung*, see G. W. F. HEGEL, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, section VI C a, *Werke*, vol. 3, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1970, pp. 442-452.

³ H. VAN ERP, *The Genuine Sublime: Kant on the Sublimity of Moral Consciousness*, in *The Sublime and Its Teleology*, ed. by D. Loose, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2012, pp. 13-41: on p. 15.

⁴ H. E. ALLISON, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, p. 204. Hence I have called this paper, «The Place of the Sublime in Kant's Project» (rather than 'System'), to emphasize the practical and agential rather than the systematic.

⁵ Deligiorgi puts her account of the Kantian sublime in terms of agency, too.

⁶ H. E. ALLISON, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, p. 203.

ocean, etc. The latter do so not by their *harmonious* forms, but by their forms nonetheless, which can give us (*inter alia*) a feeling of freedom, a feeling that has a structural parallel to the one we feel before the moral law (the feeling of moral obligation). And so in the case of sublimity, too, nature as a whole, which includes human nature, can be viewed *as if* it is on our (morality's) side.

Now, strictly speaking, the truth value of the claim that «Nature is or strives to be amenable to our moral ends» is unknown since we do not know if nature has intentions or purposes in itself, on Kant's account. The purposiveness of nature is a regulative principle of 'reflective' judgment, not a principle that determines how nature actually is. Nonetheless, we see nature in a certain way, as if it had these goals or purposes, namely, harmony with morality, or at least not being an obstacle for moral agents. This is what it means for nature to be 'amenable' to our (moral) purposes. The agent needs such beliefs if, qua agent, she is actually to think that laws of freedom can be realized in the laws of nature.

Seeing a craggy mountain, then having the experience of sublime in the full (moralized) Kantian sense, can lead a person to think: Yes, nature gives me this experience after all, an 'aesthetic' experience that leads me to reflect on my own capacity for (moral) ends, or that habituates me to something *analogous* to an agent's feeling of duty. To paraphrase Guyer, the solution is that we see products of nature as if they have moral significance, accordingly, aesthetic experiences of beauty and sublimity give us «crucial encouragement in our fundamental task of literally transforming the natural world into a moral world».¹

In short, the transition problem is not just the problem of filling in a theoretical gap in the Critical system, as the First Introduction to the third *Critique* tends to put it (*EEKU*, AA xx 244). Rather, as the published Introduction emphasizes, it concerns throwing a bridge across the immense chasm (*Kluft*) that separates freedom from nature, the supersensible from appearances, or what ought to happen from what actually happens. The transition addresses how the «supersensible in the subject» can determine «the sensible», or the natural realm, not with regard to the *cognition* of nature but with regard to the consequences in nature; these effects are produced by the idea of freedom «and the practical rules that it contains» (*KU*, AA v 195). In other words, what is at stake is exactly that which matters to an end-setting agent.

3. KANT'S ACCOUNT OF SUBLIMITY

I now characterize Kant's Critical account of sublimity insofar as it relates the transition problem and his broader philosophical aims as expressed in the third *Critique* in particular.²

In the Analytic of the Sublime (*KU*, AA v 244-278), Kant gives various formulations or descriptions of the sublime, so it can be hard to pin down what, exactly, is supposed to be sublime. In different places he suggests, variously, that the sublime is a feeling, an experience, a judgment, an idea of reason (of infinite magnitude or might), and even reason itself (the supersensible faculty), our supersensible nature, moral voca-

¹ P. GUYER, *Kant*, p. 367.

² There are many interpretations of the sublime; notable among them (in addition to those already mentioned) is P. CROWTHER, *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989.

tion, and «the idea of humanity» in the subject (*KU*, AA v 257). I cannot sort through all of these complex layers of meaning here. But I first note that, properly speaking, «sublime» (*das Erhabene*), is a raised or «elevated» state of mind (*KU*, AA v 245-247) in which the subject reflects on his own rational nature, feeling a genuine if mixed pleasure of respect (*Achtung*) for it. Even if only a *state of mind* can properly be called sublime, at one point Kant also claims that we call sublime that which is «absolutely great» or «great beyond all comparison» (*KU*, AA v 248). For instance, an idea of reason can be sublime in this way since it transcends the natural order and cannot be 'given' in nature. Whether the sublime is a mental state (or experience) or an idea of reason, no *object* is sublime in the strict sense; the object is said to be sublime only if it «awakens a feeling of a supersensible faculty in us» (*KU*, AA v 250). So strictly speaking, «sublime» does not refer to a given object, even if the experience is *initially* evoked by an large and/or powerful object, typically a natural object (here leaving aside the possibility of artistic sublimity). That the object plays a diminished role gives textual support to what may be called a «subjectivist» reading of the sublime,¹ but I wish to argue that the natural object still plays an important role in the sublime experience, and, accordingly, that some aspects of the «psychologizing»² reading of the sublime can fortunately be avoided.

The sublime, then, involves the feeling aroused by the failure of the imagination to comprehend the 'absolutely great', which can never be actually 'given' in nature. In this sense, reason, which is the source of the idea of the absolutely great, can be said to be 'superior' to nature, and this need not be read as an assertion of human mastery or domination of nature. Kant divides up the concept of the sublime into the mathematical and the dynamical. The 'absolutely great' is understood in terms of either magnitude (*Grösse*) (in the mathematical sublime: *KU*, AA v 248-260) or power (*Kraft*) (the dynamical sublime: *KU*, AA v 260-264). The mathematical and the dynamical sublime are distinguished by (*inter alia*) whether it is *theoretical* reason or *practical* reason that is in a relation with the imagination. Although we will return to this, I note here that this relation is initially disharmonious and contrapurposive, yet ultimately harmonious and purposive: «imagination and reason produce subjective purposiveness through their conflict» (*KU*, AA v 258).

The term 'mathematical' reflects the fact that the judging subject is confronted with *extensive* magnitudes, an extent or greatness in time or space. As Kant suggests in the published *Anthropology*, the term «mathematical sublime» derives from the fact that this kind of sublimity concerns enlargement (*Anth*, AA VII 177, note). With the mathematical sublime, the aesthetic judge makes an aesthetic estimation of magnitude in which the object is not thought to be actually infinite but only brings to mind the idea of infinity, an idea to which no sensible intuition could be adequate since it cannot not be 'apprehended' or taken in all in one glance by the subject (*KU*, AA v

¹ H.-G. GADAMER, *Truth and Method*, New York, Crossroad, 1975, p. 39: «the radical subjectivisation involved in Kant's new basis for aesthetics was a completely new departure». Beiner claims that Kant's analysis of the sublime, by asserting the superiority of the moral personality over nature, marks «an apotheosis of western subjectivism» (R. BEINER, *Kant, the Sublime, and Nature*, in *Kant and Political Philosophy: The Contemporary Legacy*, ed. by R. Beiner, W. J. Booth, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 281).

² DELIGIORGI, *The Pleasures of Contra-purposiveness*, p. 31: «The temptation here is to psychologize the experience of the sublime.»

251-252). Deligiorgi glosses the mathematical sublime as «trying to get to grips with something».¹ She does so in an attempt to support her «agential interpretation» in which the sublime is significant for our self-conception as agents.² Yet this strikes me as a bit of a stretch in the case of the mathematical sublime. The latter, the kind related to *theoretical* reason, seems connected to agency mostly in a metaphorical sense (imagination's 'striving', etc.). Toward the end of his discussion of the mathematical sublime, Kant explains how the experience could be said to be 'subjectively purposive' – the encountered object cannot be comprehended in one intuition and is initially contrapurposive for our perceptual or imaginative ability (*KU*, AA v 259). The effort to take up in a single intuition a measure for magnitudes, which requires an appreciable time, is «contrapurposive» when «subjectively considered,» since it exceeds our perceptual or imaginative ability. The very same violence that is inflicted on the subject through the imagination's failure «is judged as purposive for the whole vocation of the mind» (my emphasis). The feeling of the sublime is one of displeasure «concerning the aesthetic faculty of judging an object that is yet at the same time represented as purposive, which is possible because the subject's own incapacity reveals the consciousness of an unlimited capacity of the very same subject» (*KU*, AA v 259).

As readers of the first *Critique* will recognize, the term «dynamical» reflects the fact that in this form of sublimity the subject is confronted by *intensive* magnitudes or degrees of power (*KU*, AA v 268), that is, it concerns «production» and force (*Anth*, AA VII 177, note). In the published *Anthropology*, Kant claims that in the sublime, «the effort and attempt to raise ourselves to a grasp (*apprehensio*) of the object awakens in us a feeling of our own greatness and power» (*Anth*, AA VII 243).

In the case of the dynamical sublime, the judge is confronted by an object that is capable of eliciting her fear. While making the judgment, she does not in fact feel fear, since that would contravene one of the conditions of pure aesthetic judgment, disinterestedness. The feeling of the dynamical sublime lays bare «a self-preservation of quite another kind than that which can be threatened and endangered by nature outside of us» (*KU*, AA v 261): namely it reveals our capacity to 'set ends' (Deligiorgi). According to the full Kantian story – I put it this way because sometimes one commits a 'subreption' where the *object* is thought to be sublime – the judge recognizes that she has a capacity to set and pursue ends (above all, moral ones) that is unaffected by physical threats to her life and well-being.

Kant calls the experience 'pleasant' but in a unique way: a negative pleasure. Why? It is pleasant in that we contemplate and enjoy the representation of greatness in power or extent. But Kant offers two reasons for why the pleasure is called 'negative'. (The reasons are not entirely consistent.) According to the first, the movement of 'sublime' state of mind «especially in its inception» can be compared to a vibration or «rapidly alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object» (*KU*, AA v 258). The 'negative' part of the pleasure comes from the imagination's failure to live up to reason's lawful demand, even if the judgment itself «remains only aesthetic.» And it is pleasant since, as Melissa Merritt notes, one's mind is uplifted in being attracted to one's rational nature.³ Because of this, the subject will be able to 'feel' her freedom

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

² *Ibidem*, p. 33 note 10.

³ M. MCBAY MERRITT, *The Moral Source of the Sublime*, in *The Sublime*, ed. by T. Costelloe, pp. 37-49: on p. 43.

in the experience of the sublime (see section 5). So, this is one reason why the sublime experience can be called a 'mixed' state.

According to the second description, the sublime is a «momentary inhibition» of the vital powers followed immediately by an «all the more powerful» outpouring of them (*KU*, AA v 245). This movement occurs because the check on sensibility (or imagination, in the case of the mathematical sublime) is *followed* by a realization of the power and magnitude of the boundless ideas of reason. (Again, this is what will enable us to say that in the experience we feel our freedom.) In the case of the mathematical sublime, the subject takes pleasure in the failure of sensible representation, because this failure enables her to appreciate the contrasting capacity of reason to conceive the supersensible. Thankfully, whether or not the account of the pleasure is one of simultaneous oscillation or of temporal succession is not so important for my argument. The important feature is that it is an intense emotional, stirring experience, not produced by 'mere' thought or reflection, but one that involves and requires an intense feeling produced by the initially contrapurposive but ultimately purposive interaction between imagination (or sensibility) and reason.

The notion of a check or inhibition brings up the issue of how, if at all, the sublime object can be said to have purposiveness. Kant writes: «Whereas that which, without any rationalizing, merely in apprehension, excites in us the feeling of the sublime, may to be sure appear in its form to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination», it is nevertheless judged all the more sublime for that (*KU*, AA v 245). The sublime object's «form» is seen to be contrapurposive since it cannot be grasped by our sensible capacities, but this fact is put to a *use* by the subject (hence the sublime leads to 'subjective purposiveness'). Note, since there is a misleading tendency in the literature to characterize the sublime object as «formless», that the sublime object is said here to have a form («in its form»), albeit of a unique kind.

To say that a vast or powerful object of nature itself is sublime is, in Kant's terminology, to commit a 'subreption', a term that played a significant role (though with a different meaning) in his Inaugural Dissertation (1770). His definition of subreption suggests, on one reading, that in the full Kantian experience of the sublime, the appreciator is made aware of her relation to nature – her rising above it – and that the judgment includes and involves this self-conscious or self-referential aspect:

Thus the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation, which we show to an object in nature through a certain subreption (substitution of a respect for the object instead of for the idea of humanity in our subject), which as it were makes intuitable the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive faculty over the greatest faculty of sensibility.

(*KU*, AA v 257)

The term 'sublime' properly belongs to our moral vocation or 'humanity in our subject' rather than to an object of nature. Accordingly, *when* a judging subject commits a subreption¹ (and I take this passage to imply that a subreption can and does

¹ This point will be important in section five. In a subreptive judgment, the natural object is (erroneously) judged to be sublime, but viewing it this way obviously involves seeing nature as being (more) in harmony with reason, and this is one of the key ways the sublime can aid the transition to the domain governed by reason, namely, freedom.

occur, for why else would Kant explain it?), she attributes sublimity to the object, say a mountain range, in uttering the proposition or thinking, «The object is sublime».¹ Such judgments and propositions have the form ‘X is sublime’. One *says* «X is sublime», but what one really means, on the full Kantian account, is that the experiencing *subject* (or reason, humanity, etc. – Kant is not consistent, as noted) is sublime. The fully-informed Kantian subject, on the full account, would be aware of what was actually going on in the experience. (This move does have the drawback that Kant apparently thinks that anyone capable of making such a statement must be aware of Kant’s notions of humanity, freedom, moral personality, etc. – which seems plainly not to square with the phenomenology of the experience. Crowther puts this point well: while «in some people, it may be that the fearful phenomenon leads to those imaginings of moral defiance which Kant describes, in other people, it may well not».² But since I am not evaluating Kant’s theory, we may overlook this.)

One more sense of sublimity deserves mention, as Oliver Sensen has pointed out.³ Kant sometimes writes as if the sublime (the uplifted, *das Erhabene*) just *is* elevation over nature, or being raised above it. So construed, sublimity simply is the fact that the rational faculty is independent of nature: reason does not derive the laws of freedom from those of nature, but instead commands how ‘nature’ should be (what should happen in the world). This sense has little to do with aesthetic feeling and judgment *per se*. Typical of this non-aesthetic sense is Kant’s reference to «the sublimity of our nature (in its vocation)» (*KpV*, AA v 87) or the sublimity of our «spiritual capacity» (*Geistesvermögen*) and «vocation» (*KU*, AA v 262) or sublime «moral predisposition» (*MS*, AA v1 435). Or consider: «it is something very sublime in human nature to be determined to actions directly by a pure rational law» (*KpV*, AA v 117; cf. *KpV*, AA v 7, my epigraph). While Kant certainly uses ‘sublime’ in this sense, the sublime as being elevated above nature has no necessary connection to feeling. This article concerns instead the sense of the term as a feeling and judgment, for it is after all to the sublime in this sense that Kant devotes an *Analytic of the Sublime*. Moreover, sublimity as elevation or independence would already imply freedom (or, at least, a person would be taking herself as already free). That would be uninteresting if we wanted a sensory, palpable hint that we are free, which, as we will soon see, is one of the key roles that the sublime plays in Kant’s project.

4. SUBLIMITY CAN SYMBOLIZE MORALITY

Although Kant does not base morality on any kind of feeling, including *a fortiori* pure aesthetic feelings, he does claim that beauty can symbolize morality. In this section, I show that what he says about beauty can be fruitfully applied to sublimity.

¹ I leave aside the question of whether a subreption always, never, or sometimes occurs and whether we necessarily make subreptive judgments of the sublime. In this context, however, it is useful to note that Emily Brady «assume[s] that it [the subreption] necessarily occurs, and defend[s] the role of the object in light of this more stringent interpretation» (70 n.4). I here simply note that Kant claims, quite ambiguously, that that we speak improperly *when we call nature sublime* (*KU*, AA v 280; cf. 262, 268).

² P. CROWTHER, *The Kantian Aesthetic: From Knowledge to the Avant-Garde*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 190.

³ O. SENSEN, *Kant on Human Dignity*, Berlin-New York, de Gruyter, 2011.

What are symbols? They contain «indirect presentations» of the concepts of reason (*i.e.*, ideas), which only reason can think and to which no sensible intuition can be adequate (*KU*, AA v 351). Of three kinds of «demonstrations of the reality of concepts», symbols are therefore to be distinguished from «examples» (which demonstrate the reality of empirical concepts) and «schematic» presentations (which demonstrate the reality of the Kantian categories). A *symbolic* hypotyposis, unlike a schematic and direct one, is one «in accordance with an analogy, where the expression does not contain the actual schema for the concept but only a symbol for reflection» (*KU*, AA v 352). In a symbolic presentation governed by analogy, an idea of reason is matched with a fitting intuition, and the power of judgment proceeds in a way with the intuition. What corresponds to the concept is merely the *rule* of this procedure, not of the intuition itself, and thus merely the «form of the reflection,» not the content. The power of judgment first applies the concept to the object of a sensible intuition, and then applies the «mere rule of reflection» on that intuition to an entirely different object, of which the first is only the symbol. Examples of symbolic hypotyposis are the analogy between a just political state and a living, animated body; a despotic, unjust state and a handmill; and of course beauty and the morally good. In these cases, the similarity consists between the rule for reflecting on the two objects «and their causality» (*KU*, AA v 352).

After declaring, «Now I say that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good», Kant adduces several aspects of this analogy between beauty and morality while noting differences between them (*KU*, AA v 353-354). (I here focus on the features of beauty rather than on Kant's moral philosophy.) He makes four claims here. First, the beautiful pleases *immediately* in reflecting intuition. Second, beauty pleases *without any interest*. Third, the *freedom* of the imagination (or sensibility) is represented in the judging of the beautiful as in accord with the lawfulness of the understanding. Fourth and finally, the subjective principle for judging of the beautiful is represented as *universal, i.e.*, valid for everyone, but not as knowable by any universal concept.

Now, what is true of beauty, what allows Kant to draw a comparison with morality, also holds for the sublime.¹ Like beauty, all judgments of the sublime can meet the necessary conditions of pure aesthetic judgment, at least under 'ideal' circumstances. That is, the sublime's satisfaction must be represented as universally valid, disinterested, subjectively purposive, and necessary. «For as a judgment of the aesthetic reflecting power of judgment, the satisfaction in the sublime, just like that in the beautiful, must be represented as universally valid in its quantity, as without interest in its quality, as subjective purposiveness in its relation, and the latter, as far as its modality is concerned, as necessary» (*KU*, AA v 247). These four logical features apply to any pure aesthetic judgment of the sublime.²

The qualities that allowed the beautiful to function as a symbol of morality – immediacy of pleasure, disinterestedness, freedom, universal validity – can be applied

¹ On beauty as a symbol of morality, see G. FELICITAS MUNZEL, *The Beautiful is the Symbol of the Morally-Good: Kant's Philosophical Basis of Proof for the Idea of the Morally-Good*, «Journal of the History of Philosophy», xxxiii, 1995, pp. 301-330; H. E. ALLISON, *Kant's Theory of Taste*, pp. 236-267; P. GUYER, *Kant*, pp. 377 ff.; and J. KIRWAN, *The Aesthetic in Kant*, London-New York, Continuum, pp. 172-173.

² See also H. VAN ERP, *The Genuine Sublime*, p. 36.

to the sublime once we make the appropriate adjustments. First, just as the concept of the morally good brings about an *immediate pleasure* that is not achieved by the satisfaction of means to ends, the aesthetic reflection on the ultimate harmony between sensibility and the ideas of reason pleases immediately in the sublime. To adduce the immediacy of the pleasure is not to overlook that the feeling of pleasure in the sublime is also what Kant calls 'negative'. In fact, this makes the analogy with morality even stronger, for the pleasure in the moral feeling of respect is also negative, a 'humiliation' of our sensibility. At the same time, sublimity and the moral feeling of respect have a positive affective dimension as well, a pleasurable sense of being uplifted. Accordingly, feeling this negative-positive pleasure in the sublime can prepare us for how it feels when confronted by the moral law.¹ For both feelings are a kind of respect, which Kant defines as «the feeling of the inadequacy of our capacity for the attainment of an idea that is a law for us» (*KU*, AA v 257). On my reading, the sublime feeling is a pure aesthetic, contemplative respect (*ibidem*), whereas the moral feeling is a pure moral respect, respect for the moral law.

Second, the feeling in the sublime is not only *disinterested*, but the sublime also teaches us to esteem contrary to sensory interests (*KU*, AA v 271). In the sublime, the sensible faculty is shown to be inadequate. In experiencing the sublime and making judgments of sublimity, we understand by analogy how the moral law feels (*ibidem*). Third, sublimity is a feeling of *freedom* (see also the next section). It can encourage us as agents by supporting our belief that we are free. The sublime allows us to feel that we have a free power to set ends, belief in which, for Kant, is a necessary condition of morality. Fourth, the *universal validity* of pure judgments of the sublime gives them a communicability that is analogous to the universal validity of moral judgments. In making judgments of sublimity, we also communicate to other human beings that we are having an experience that, for Kant, is founded in human nature (cf. the end of section five).

If it is correct that in its own way the sublime has the four features that make it possible for the beautiful to symbolize morality, then the sublime, as Guyer also notes, can symbolize morality.² In fact, Kant nearly says just this himself. After describing the positive-negative structure of the moral law, Kant implies that that the sublime has this structure and that this allows the sublime to symbolize morality. Kant claims that when we are confronted by the moral law, sensibility makes a sacrifice and feels deprived, resulting in the negative part of the 'negative pleasure', but that there is also a positive moment from the viewpoint of reason, which has an interest in realizing the morally good. Kant then asserts that the sublime can represent or symbolize³ morality.

From this it follows that the intellectual, intrinsically purposive (moral) good, judged aesthetically, must not be represented so much as beautiful but rather as sublime, so that it arouses more the feeling of respect (which scorns charm) than that of love and intimate affection,

¹ For a first-personal, phenomenological study of our confrontation with the moral law, see J. GRENBERG, *Kant's Defense of Common Moral Experience: A Phenomenological Account*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, which does not, however, make an explicit connection to natural sublimity.

² P. GUYER, *Kant*, p. 377: «Kant's... claim that the sublime is the most appropriate symbol of morality.»

³ While not all instances of representing are symbolizations (e.g., I can represent a dog by words or pictures, but the latter are not symbols in Kant's sense), all symbolizations, being the narrower of the two concepts, would count as representations.

since human nature does not agree with that good of its own accord, but only through the dominion that reason exercises over sensibility.

(*KU*, AA v 271)

Moreover, in the second *Critique* Kant suggests that morality is best represented as sublime rather than beautiful. «Actions of others that are done with great sacrifice and for the sake of duty alone may indeed be praised by calling them noble and sublime deeds» (*KpV*, AA v 85). This leads to his famous encomium to duty: «Duty! Sublime and mighty name that embraces nothing charming or insinuating...» (*KpV*, AA v 86). In short, like beauty, the sublime can symbolize morality and thereby contribute to the transition to freedom. To state this is not to base ethics on aesthetic feeling in any of its forms (pure or otherwise) – a move which Kant would certainly reject – but to say that Kant himself implies that both kinds of pure aesthetic judgments (and their associated feelings) can play a role.

If, in the ways to be discussed in the following section, sublimity indirectly encourages us to be moral, it would *not* undermine genuinely moral motivation, which at least on Kant's mature, Critical view, must be a motivation to do one's duty purely and only because it is right, not because it makes the agent sublime. For the experiencing subject, unlike a person striving to do the right thing, is not an agent but a contemplative yet stirred spectator. The pleasure in the sublime is «a pleasure of contemplation» (*KU*, AA v 292). Let us examine those ways in more detail.

5. HOW SUBLIMITY CONTRIBUTES TO THE TRANSITION

There are three main ways in which sublimity can aid the transition. First, by being an indirect sensory awareness of *freedom*, it can give a palpable intimation that we are free. Second, if, as I have argued, sublimity has the same structure as the moral feeling of respect, it can provide a symbolic analogy for the moral feeling of respect, which we feel before the moral law. This means that it can indirectly assist moral *motivation*. Third, insofar as it reveals a harmony between nature and freedom, it can give further hints that nature is in *harmony* with the ends of freedom.

A feeling of freedom. As Guyer puts it,¹ one of the necessary conditions of realizing morality in the natural order is that we *believe that we are free* to choose to do what is required of us rather than to do what all our other motives might suggest to us. I am proposing that sublimity can be of assistance here. Kant holds that the sublime is grounded on freedom and is a pure aesthetic feeling of freedom (*KU*, AA v 245-246, 265, 280), understood as 'independence' from nature or as a capacity to set ends. The concept of the sublime in nature indicates something purposive «only in the possible use of its intuitions to make palpable [*fühlbar*] in ourselves a purposiveness that is entirely *independent* of nature» (*KU*, AA v 246; my emphasis). The object that acts as a stimulus for the experience is, or at least can be, an occasion for the sensible awareness of the subject's cognitive or practical freedom. This awareness can be used for moral purposes or ends (*KU*, AA v 280). Sublimity can encourage us as agents by supporting our belief that we are free to do as morality requires and free to choose to live up to its demands.

¹ P. GUYER, *Values of Beauty*, pp. 201-202.

How exactly is it an *experience* of freedom, if Kant clearly maintains that freedom cannot be cognized or known in an objective judgment? In the mathematical sublime, the imagination fails to comprehend in one intuition the absolutely great or extensive as reason demands (*KU*, AA v 254), showing the independence of theoretical reason. In the dynamical sublime, the powerful, overwhelming object discloses the triviality of health and even life in a pure aesthetic experience that we, however weak and mortal, are not determined by sensuous incentives in the selection of maxims but are able to overcome our self-serving drives to health and self-preservation, allowing us to «discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance» to inner and outer nature (*KU*, AA v 261).

The awareness that we are not determined by sensible impulses leads to the idea that we are subject to the moral law (*GMS*, AA iv 446-447; *KpV*, AA v 29), and by implication, to the idea of our moral vocation (*Bestimmung*). Accordingly, in response to a natural object, the aesthetic judge can even become conscious of her moral vocation. The feeling of the sublime is in that case respect for the humanity in her subject (again, in an 'orthodox' reading). Although this awareness is not recognition of the moral law or its content as such, it does involve the recognition of a moral calling. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (*RGV*, AA vi 49-50) and in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (*KpV*, AA v 158), Kant implies that the experience of the sublime, by reminding us of our moral vocation, can further prepare us for the latter, thereby assisting the transition from the laws of nature to the law of freedom.

I briefly mention some contemporary commentaries on the sublime, to see how the sublime could be construed as an experience of freedom. Explaining her own agent-based yet non-moralizing account of the sublime, Deligiorgi claims that the source of its pleasure is this: «since our identity as purposive beings persists and remains intact, it is also true that there are things that *are* in our power to do.»¹ Now, it strikes me that we can assert, without 'moralizing' the sublime (as she understandably does not wish to do), that this disclosed 'power' is still a kind of freedom, an ability to set and pursue ends. Malcom Budd likewise offers a non-moral grounding. For Budd, when confronted by the great or powerful natural object, a «disruption of our ordinary sense of self» leads to a «sudden dropping away...of our everyday sense of the importance of our self and its numerous concerns and projects,» which «after the initial shock, [is] experienced with pleasure».² While again not 'moralized' in Kant's sense, this rising above everyday concerns would count as a kind of freedom that the subject experiences in the sublime. Finally, according to Crowther's reconstruction of Kant's mathematical sublime (his reconstruction of the dynamical sublime runs parallel to this), the sensible object «realizes» the scope of rational conceptualization precisely because it cannot be grasped as a totality at the perceptual and imaginative level, which accounts for our pleasure. «In such an experience», he claims, «we feel ourselves as transcending the limits imposed by embodiment».³

¹ K. DELIGIORGI, *The Pleasures of Contra-purposiveness*, p. 32.

² M. BUDD, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature: Essays on the Aesthetics of Nature*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002, p. 85.

³ CROWTHER, *The Kantian Sublime*, 147. Commenting this passage, Deligiorgi clarifies that her account merely requires «a more benign» view of the limits of embodiment, not transcendence of them. Nevertheless, her account still makes use of the notion of the experience or disclosure of an agent's power to set ends.

Coming from another philosophical tradition, Francophone philosophers have also connected the sublime to freedom. The readings of Lyotard, Nancy, Escoubas, and Lacoue-Labarthe might be innovative or interesting on their own right, but here I cite these commentators to help us understand how the sublime as a 'feeling of freedom' can contribute to Kant's project. Lyotard's reading is arguably the most original and philosophically innovative.¹ Yet for Lyotard the sublime reveals only that human beings play a language-game using the concepts of freedom, justice, and morality. Thus, the transition is not exactly from the way of thinking about nature to the way of thinking about freedom, but from a family of propositions to another family of propositions. Nonetheless, even Lyotard's philosophy of a *différend* presumably involves and requires *some* kind of freedom, even if a limited (and certainly non-moral) kind.

Jean-Luc Nancy refers to «the sublime destination of reason itself: freedom.»² Although this looks promising, I am puzzled by his later claim that «[t]his means neither that freedom is the content or the object of the judgment of the sublime nor that it is freedom that makes itself felt in the feeling of the sublime»,³ as this runs against Kant's text. Perhaps he is aware of this and even does so intentionally: «My contribution is neither historical nor aesthetic».⁴ Nancy focuses on the presentation of presentation («it presents itself») and (like Lyotard) on *imagination* rather than reason or ideas of reason. Nancy's discussion, whatever its merits, is close to that of Lyotard, whom he cites with approval: «They [Lyotard and Derrida] are certainly not wrong, and they comment rigorously ... upon the text of Kant».⁵ His account does not appear to differ substantially from Lyotard's. Escoubas reaches a conclusion similar to Nancy's. She writes: «The sublime is another name for the imagination itself,» and continues, «the Kantian sublime, then, is ... an intermediate glimpse of the appearing of what appears. Of appearing itself».⁶

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's account, also (post-)Heideggerian, approvingly cites Lyotard's formula that the sublime is the presentation that there is the «non-presentable».⁷ In my view, Lacoue-Labarthe does not offer a reading of sublimity and freedom that differs substantially from those three mentioned above and does not provide a viable alternative to Lyotard. All four of these commentators would presumably consider it a philosophical shortcoming that Kant takes the sublime to be a symbol of *morality* in the full Kantian sense, with all of its 'Enlightenment' trappings, though this is precisely one key role that the sublime plays in Kant's project. In this sense their readings are not 'orthodox' the way mine is.

Nevertheless, in various ways all of these commentators, despite their distinct philosophical traditions, imply that the sublime is an experience of a certain kind of

¹ J.-F. LYOTARD, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant's «Critique of Judgment,» Sections 23–29*, transl. by E. Rottenberg, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994; and *L'Enthousiasme: La critique kantienne de l'histoire*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1986.

² J.-L. NANCY, *The Sublime Offering*, in *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, ed. by J. S. Librett, Albany (NY), SUNY Press, 1993, pp. 25–53: on p. 27.

³ J.-L. NANCY, *The Sublime Offering*, p. 48.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 225. Nancy's discussion focuses on the presentation of freedom by *freedom* itself, a complicated notion to say the least.

⁵ *Ibidem*, *The Sublime Offering*, p. 42 and p. 226, respectively.

⁶ É. ESCOUBAS, *Kant or the Simplicity of the Sublime*, in *Of the Sublime*, pp. 55–70: on p. 69 and p. 70, respectively.

⁷ PH. LACOUÉ-LABARTHE, *The Sublime Truth*, in *Of the Sublime*, pp. 71–108: on p. 74. See also p. 96.

freedom, even if not the full-blown, moralized notion of freedom or Kantian autonomy. And perhaps even that would be enough, with some more argumentation, to get Kant what he wanted.¹

Motivation to be moral. If we are to realize the ends of morality in nature, we must have an adequate motivation for our attempt to do what morality requires of us instead of the mere desirability of particular goals it might happen to license or impose in particular circumstances. The sublime can help here, too. By virtue of an affinity between the structures of the sublime and the moral feeling, the experience of the sublime can prepare us to attempt to do what morality requires of us.² Kant describes sublimity as being contrary to the sensory interests of the subject, in that one's physical well-being (or imagination) is threatened by the powerful (or vast) object. Such an experience can prepare us not only for the disinterestedness but also for the conflicts with sensory interests that are associated with morality. In feeling the sublime, we experience a feeling that is not only disinterested and not based on an interest, but, like the moral feeling of respect, even runs *contrary* to our self-centered, sensible interests. Such habituation can help us act out of moral respect when the right time comes.³ As Guyer puts it, «It is only the mixed experience of the sublime that brings home to feeling that this freedom must often be exercised in the face of resistance offered by our own merely natural inclinations».⁴ And this is important if, as stated in section two, human beings' natural inclinations to (*e.g.*) the lust for power, the domination of others, vanity – in short «inner nature» – make up the main obstacles to realizing morality.

An empirical sign of harmony with nature. Another condition of realizing morality in the natural realm is that we believe that the ends that morality imposes upon us can *actually* be achieved in nature. Although any run-of-the-mill experience of Kantian sublimity would give a palpable hint (though not knowledge or proof) that we have a power to set ends, it would not necessarily provide any indication that the ends of freedom could be realized *in* nature. Although the sublime, properly speaking, involves a realization of one's independence from nature and end-setting ability, some instances of the sublime may be able to contribute to an understanding of ourselves as being *in harmony* with nature.

¹ Perhaps commentators who are skeptical of (Kantian) moral autonomy's role in the sublime, as many of the aforementioned are, could go from their limited notion of freedom (setting ends, including even Lyotard's «end» of playing language-games) and then consider and evaluate Kant's arguments from end-setting in general to the moral law's objective validity for rational, end-setting beings. On the latter move, cf. CH. KORSGAARD, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, esp. pp. 179-183. In this way, the *experience* itself would not be moralized in the full sense (which would better reflect the experience's phenomenology), but could be used for the moral ends dear to Kant, namely, in an argument concerning the objective validity of the moral law. This would be a very indirect way to use the sublime to make a transition to (our way of thinking about) freedom. But of course, strictly speaking, Kant himself wanted to get there more quickly, using the non-subreptive judgment itself.

² It may help to distinguish two roles the sublime can play in moral motivation. First, it could help make the moral law more accessible to us as a subjective determining ground or choice (or what Kant calls an 'incentive'). Or, second, it could help us sustain our resolve to be moral in the face of countervailing inclinations. In the first case, the sublime would be a condition of possibility for (more attuned) *moral sensibility*. In the second, it would be a condition of the possibility for *virtue*.

³ P. GUYER, *Values of Beauty*, p. 202.

⁴ *IDEM*, *Kant*, p. 337.

One way this occurs involves Kant's particular notion of a 'subreption', which, it will be recalled, involves a misapplication of respect, *i.e.*, respect for the natural object rather than for the humanity in one's subject. When (if) a subreption occurs in the experience of the sublime, the natural object is viewed by the aesthetic judge as being in harmony with the laws of freedom. To use Kant's heavier language: the subreption can bring to mind a possible ontological unity of the supersensible ground of nature with the supersensible ground of humanity.¹ When a subreption obtains, the aesthetic judge can see a consistency between the laws of nature and freedom. In other words, when a subreption is committed, the sublime suggests a 'harmony' between freedom and nature.

The «subreption» in the experience of the sublime is no ordinary error. In the subreption, we claim that the natural object is sublime rather than recognize that our own ideas of reason (etc.) are most properly sublime. But the fact that we nonetheless attribute such apparently infinite scale (mathematical sublime) or power (dynamical sublime) to the natural object nonetheless can give us a view of nature as itself *consonant* with the demands of reason. Note that this 'consonance' involves nature's pointing beyond itself to reason. Nevertheless, if right, so emphasizing the role of the natural object would add to the responses to a standard objection against Kant's account of the sublime,² *viz.*, that it almost eliminates the natural object from the experience of the sublime, treating it as a mere occasion for self-appreciation on the part of the viewer. Emphasizing harmony with nature, my proposed reading also offers a reply to the disapproving characterizations of the Kantian sublime as hegemonic or anti-nature or as an «apotheosis of western subjectivism» (Beiner), since nature is seen as a *source* of an important and enriching human experience, and arguably should therefore be conserved and protected.³

If this is right, we can understand the claims that «*Nature is thus sublime* in those of its appearances the intuition of which brings with them the idea of its infinity» (*KU*, AA v 255), and that «*Nature considered in aesthetic judgment as a power that has no dominion over us is dynamically sublime*» (*KU*, AA v 260; emphases added), as characterizations of nature's important role in the sublime, even if what can be judged sublime is not so much the natural object as the mental attunement estimating it aesthetically (*KU*, AA v 256). Hence, although the sublime in nature is only *improperly* called sublime (*KU*, AA v 280), nature can be considered sublime under a certain description.

In this way, in our aesthetic judgment *nature is judged as sublime* not insofar as it arouses fear, but rather because it calls forth our power (which is not part of nature) to regard those things about which we are concerned (goods, health and life) as trivial.

(*KU*, AA v 262; cf. 268; emphasis added)

¹ Cf. Kant's claim that the bridge between nature and freedom only works if we can assume a supersensible substratum (*EEKU*, AA xx 247). Again, I aim not to evaluate his claims here, but to put them in their proper place.

² Katrina Deligiorgi, Melissa Merritt, and Emily Brady likewise raise this concern.

³ This 'anthropic' basis for the care for nature, of course, still remains human-centered and is unlikely to please those who argue that we have a duty to nature for its own sake. On the sublime and the environment, see E. BRADY, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, pp. 183-206.

And in the «General Remark» on the sublime, Kant indicates that the natural *object* is represented as purposive for reason:

This reflection of the aesthetic power of judgment, elevating itself to adequacy to reason (yet without a determinate concept of the latter), represents the object, precisely by means of the objective inadequacy of the imagination in its greatest extension to reason (as a faculty of ideas), as subjectively purposive.

(KU, AA v 269)

In evoking a sensory awareness of the appreciator's distinctness from outer and inner nature, *nature* gives itself up to reason in an experience of one's cognitive or practical power, an experience that reveals freedom's harmony with nature, not just simple release from it. The sublime experience begins as a response to the properties of the vast or overpowering object of nature. It appears *as if* nature itself were designed to give us an experience of freedom.

Even if the 'form' of the object still strikes us as contrapurposive, nature as a whole appears purposive in giving itself up in a «schema» of ideas, which can be put to the agent's ends. What is repellent yet attractive for sensibility (or imagination) consists «precisely in the inadequacy of nature to the latter [the ideas of reason]...and of the effort of the imagination to treat nature as a schema for them» (KU, AA v 265). Kant succinctly adds: the sublime «is an object (of nature) the representation of which determines the mind to think of the unattainability of nature as a presentation of ideas» (KU, AA v 268). We think of nature as a whole as a presentation of the supersensible (ideas): «This effort ... compels us to think nature itself in its totality, as the presentation of something supersensible, subjectively, without being able to produce this presentation objectively» (KU, AA v 268).

Before concluding, let me respond to a potential criticism that alleges that since sublimity *presupposes* a kind of freedom (morality), it cannot prepare us for morality understood as freedom ('the laws of freedom'). After all, in explaining the 'necessity' of the judgment, Kant claims that without moral cultivation and «culture», we would feel only aversion in the face of nature's power and would not be capable of feeling the sublime: «without the development of moral ideas, that which we, prepared by culture, call sublime will appear merely repellent to the unrefined person» (KU, AA v 265). Is it not then viciously circular to claim that the sublime can prepare us for morality?

Leaving aside whether or not the experience of sublimity is actually (as I suspect) more universal¹ than Kant implies here, we can observe Kant's own response. The judgment on the sublime in nature is *not* «first generated by culture and ... introduced into society merely as a matter of convention» but instead «has its foundation in human nature, and indeed in that which can be required of everyone and demanded of him ... namely in the predisposition to the feeling for (practical) ideas, *i.e.*, to that which is moral» (KU, AA v 265). Because the sublime «relates the imagination to reason, as the faculty of ideas, we require it only under a subjective presupposition (which...we believe ourselves to be justified in demanding of everyone), namely that

¹ See V. KONEČNÍ, *The Aesthetic Trinity: Awe, Being Moved, Thrills*, «Bulletin of Psychology and the Arts», v, 2, 2005, pp. 27-44; and *Aesthetic Trinity Theory and the Sublime*, «Philosophy Today», LV, 1, 2011, pp. 64-73.

of the moral feeling in the human being» (KU, AA v 266). Thus, he writes later, «I can still require even that satisfaction [of the sublime] of everyone, but only by means of the moral law, which for its part is in turn grounded on concepts of reason» (KU, AA v 292). In other words, even the «unrefined» person can be required if not *expected* to assent to the judgment of the sublime in nature. Kant's account is not interested in listing or determining which individuals or societies actually make or made judgments of sublimity; he is not interested in the sublime's historical development in that sense. Moreover, it is true that the sublime 'presupposes' an end-setting capacity insofar as the sublime is a merely sensible awareness of that capacity, and one cannot disclose something that does not in some way already exist, but the crucial point is that the sublime gives *further* hints of our power to set ends. In other words, for Kant's project, the more intimations the better.¹ Finally, it is simply not the case that just because x presupposes y, x cannot further contribute to y. (Consider: x = eating food; y = being alive). Sublimity can presuppose a capacity to set (moral) ends, and still contribute to the latter.

If my interpretations are correct, then just as the beautiful «makes possible the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest» (KU, AA v 354), so too can the sublime assist the transition from the pursuits of self-interest to those of an agent's (moral) ends.

6. CONCLUSION

I have argued that, even if the sublime cannot bring about moral action on its own, the experience can partly contribute to the realization of the laws of freedom within the natural realm in several ways. For Kant, the opposition between nature and freedom cannot be 'sublated' (*aufgehoben*) in Hegelian fashion; a dialectical transition from imagination to reason is not a viable option. Kantian philosophy cannot accept the notion of an unconditioned (idea) in the world. We have, at most, symbols of ideas, or nature viewed as if it were a 'schema' of ideas, but it is a symbolization nonetheless.²

I close with a caveat about concluding too much from the experience of Kantian sublimity. The warning is this: if my readings are correct, the sublime offers a sensible hint of freedom, but for Kant it still does not offer a proof that human beings are free. The sublime does not provide a cognition (synthetic a priori or otherwise) of freedom. Nor does it immediately make us more moral or *directly* instantiate moral ends in nature. It is still incumbent upon us as agents to actualize morality and, as Kant would put it, to realize the kingdom of ends.³ The sublime in nature provides a merely sensible hint of the unconditioned, not – as in post-Kantian philosophy and

¹ One could thus say that the sublime, like the moral law, can act as a *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom, that is, a sensuous indication of independence from sensuous impulses.

² See also D. LOOSE, *The Dynamic Sublime as the Pivoting Point between Nature and Freedom in Kant*, in *The Sublime*, ed. by D. Loose, p. 54.

³ This is perhaps why Herman van Erp, in *The Sublime*, ed. by D. Loose, p. 39, concludes that «building the bridge [to freedom] must and can only come from action determined by moral principles». This point is well taken, but note however that if this were really the case, we would not need a *bridge* at all – we would already be at our destination.

Romantic poetry – through aesthetic *intuition*, but through a kind of pure aesthetic experience all the same.

Whereas Christine Pries argues that the feeling of the sublime is the real impulse of Kantian philosophy,¹ I will conclude, perhaps less boldly, that the place of the sublime in Kant's project is, like any bridge, surely somewhere in the middle, between origin and goal.

ABSTRACT

I argue that the Kantian sublime can help address a uniquely Kantian problem known as the 'transition' problem, or the problem of how to actualize the 'laws of freedom' (that is, morality) within the natural order. Like beauty, the sublime has the requisite features of a 'symbol' of morality. I characterize three additional ways the sublime can assist the transition. I thus put into question some prominent readings of Kant's theory, e.g. that as a mere 'appendix' to his theory of nature, Kant's account of the sublime has little connection to his project's main aims. The place of the sublime is thus near the middle.

¹ CHR. PRIES, *Übergänge ohne Brücken*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1995.

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