Chapter 3

A Principled Account of Artistic Sublimity in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*

Joshua D. F. Hooke

A curious feature in Immanuel Kant's account of the mathematically sublime is the choice of examples, namely, the Pyramids of Egypt and St. Peter's Basilica.[1] In the paragraph following these examples, Kant suggests that the sublime does not exhibit itself in works of art.[2] This ambiguity has led scholars to question the possibility of "artistic sublimity." The scholarship has prompted discussions about whether works of art that evoke the sublime feeling are genuine sublime experiences. A representational account of artistic sublimity restricts the sublime to experiences in raw nature. Art can depict the sublime stylistically; however, it cannot evoke the feeling of sublimity.[3] On an opposing interpretation, the sublime occurs because of a conflict between imagination and reason; any work of art that provokes this conflict is sublime. As a result, the power of the sublime overrides and annihilates determinate ends, allowing pure aesthetic judgments.[4] The alleged contradiction in Kant's account of the mathematical sublime is also read as an interpretive issue regarding purity, prompting the pure-impure distinction.[5] Art that has the power to evoke the feeling of sublimity is deemed "impurely sublime" because of the admixture of interest. Alternatively, if aesthetic judgments of the sublime are satisfied irrespective of the object, then art is purely sublime without needing a further determination. Following Henry Allison, I defend the view that we should preserve a pure–impure distinction. A concept of impure sublimity allows us to account for an emotionally motiving satisfaction akin to the sublime in the presence of some works of art while maintaining a close reading of the Kantian account of pure sublimity as an exclusive consequence of raw nature.[6]

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant identifies the sublime as an elevated disposition of the mind caused by the apprehension of raw nature. In the presence of towering mountains or vast, stormy seas, the mind abandons

the object form, causing violence to the imagination and reason. The sublime forces the mind to come to terms with its limit and vocation; however, reason overcomes this displeasure by recognizing the supersensible. In sublime experiences, the mind is attracted and repelled resulting in "negative pleasure" through admiration and respect. According to Kant, *pure* aesthetic judgments of the sublime occur in the presence of raw nature where determinate ends do not condition an object's form or magnitude. This leaves little room for art, having determinate ends, to evoke sublimity. Kant provides an analysis of the relationship between the beautiful and the sublime, the beautiful and art, the beautiful and nature, and the sublime and nature; however, there seems to be a missing link between the sublime and art. Despite Kant's long and careful treatment of the arts from §43 to §55, there is no account of artistic sublimity. To create further confusion, Kant hints at the connection and never denies the possibility outright.[7]

WHAT IS THE SUBLIME? WHERE DOES THE CONTRADICTION LIE?

In an instance of the sublime, comprehension becomes more difficult because apprehension advances to its maximum. The imagination strives to comprehend the object in accordance with the demand of reason and initially fails to do so. As Kant puts it,

> There is in our imagination a striving to advance to the infinite, while in our reason there lies a claim to absolute totality, as to a real idea, the very inadequacy of our faculty for estimating the magnitude of the things in the sensible world [viz., imagination] awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty in us. . . . This makes it possible to explain a point that Nicolas Savary (1750–1788) notes in his report on Egypt: Having arrived at the foot of the pyramids, we circled it, contemplated it with a sort of terror. . . . The very same thing can also suffice to explain the bewilderment or sort of embarrassment that is said to seize the spectator on first entering St. Peter's in Rome.[8]

In the presence of the pyramids of Egypt or St. Peter's Basilica, Kant suggests,

> there is a feeling of the inadequacy of imagination for presenting the ideas of a whole, in which the imagination reaches its maximum and, in the effort to extend it, sinks back into itself, but is thereby transported into an emotionally moving satisfaction.[9]

In the next paragraph, Kant argues that *pure* aesthetic judgments of the sublime cannot be mixed with teleological or determinate ends, noting that,

> If the aesthetic judgment is to be *pure (not mixed up with anything teleological* as judgments of reason) and if an example of that is to be given which is fully appropriate for the critique of the aesthetic power of judgment, then the sublime must not be shown in products of art (e.g., buildings, columns, etc.), where a human end determines the form as well as the magnitude, nor in natural things *whose concept already brings with it a determinate end* (e.g., animals of a known natural determination), but rather in raw nature (and even in this only insofar as it [raw nature] by itself brings with it neither charm nor emotion from real danger), merely insofar as it contains magnitude.[10]

Pure aesthetic judgments do not have ends as their determining ground; this means that the pyramids of Egypt and St. Peter's Basilica are either "monstrous" or "colossal." In both cases, the object either annihilates its constitutive end (monstrous) or the object (with an end) is "too great" for apprehension (colossal). Both characteristics result in the feeling of sublimity, but possess an admixture of determinate ends; thus they cannot be deemed pure aesthetic judgments of the sublime. It is possible that Kant does not want to deny Savary and others of an emotionally moving satisfaction in the presence of objects that are either monstrous or colossal. However, it remains to be shown whether the pyramids of Egypt and St. Peter's Basilica are paradigmatic, or whether they are used merely to instantiate the feeling of sublimity through familiar examples.

THE REPRESENTATIONAL ACCOUNT

On the representational account, a coherent Kantian theory of artistic sublimity must go beyond the applicability of the predicate "sublime" to works of art and include a reflective occurrence. Uygar Abaci argues that natural sublimity and beautiful art "are established with diverse concerns" in Kant's mind. Artistic sublimity is "impure, restricted to problematic cases and by no means a coherent theory."[11] There may be instances where a sense of sublimity is attributed to a work of art; yet these exceptions are not genuine instances of sublimity.[12] Pure artistic sublimity for Abaci is not possible under a Kantian conception of art for two reasons: "(1) The intentionality of artistic production and the conscious appreciation of the product's objective purposiveness by its audience, and (2) The representational character of art as representing things beautifully."[13]

Abaci argues that, "In order for us to make an aesthetic judgment about a work of art, we must make the logical/determining judgment that it is a work of art. . . . [T]his brings in the awareness that it is a product of intentional action . . . thus, intentionally directed toward our satisfaction."[14] When

making aesthetic judgments about artwork, we first recognize the determinant end, namely that the artwork intends to produce pleasure. Abaci is setting the stage to contrast the intention of art by the artist vis-à-vis the disinterested purposiveness in nature.[15] If art's primary intention is to produce pleasure, then it cannot be the same as nature; it cannot incorporate sublimity. However, upon a closer reading, Kant suggests that the intentions of the artist do not guarantee our appreciation of the art.[16]

On my view, Abaci is mistakenly attributing the logical/determining judgments of the perceptual form of art as the lone contributor to aesthetic judgments. The appreciation of art is not based on our awareness that it is art. Rather, the pleasure and experience we get from art occurs when art looks to us as nature and does not seem intentional. While beautiful art is intentional, it must not seem intentional. When art appears to the observer as nature, it hides the "rules in accordance" with how it was made.[17] Beautiful art is free from the artist's hand and "without the academic form showing through."[18] In other words, art is beautiful when it looks to us like nature, free from all the formal constraints of artistic production. Abaci is correct, however, to point out that "the form of the work of art determined by a human end [is] one of Kant's reservations for the applicability of *pure* judgments of sublimity to works of art."[19] Thus, even if we are to experience sublimity in art, it cannot be a pure aesthetic judgment of the sublime. Works of art are determined by a human end irrespective of the moments it appears free of artistic intention.

Abaci goes on to suggest that Kant's conception of art is directed toward that which pleases us because art is a "beautiful thing."[20] Kant indicates that "Beautiful art displays its excellence precisely by describing beautifully that which in nature would be ugly or displeasing: "The furies, diseases, devastations of war, and the like can, as harmful things, be very beautifully described."[21] The example of war is reminiscent of Kant's considerations about the sublime and nature. Kant suggests that,

AQ: Please provide the corresponding closing quotation mark for "Beautiful art displays …"

> even war, if it is conducted with order and reverence for the rights of civilians, has something sublime about it, and at the same time makes the mentality of the people who conduct it in this way all the more sublime.[22]

However, when speaking about the sublime represented in art, Kant claims what is typically sublime *only* appears beautifully: "if the furies, diseases, devastations of war are represented in art realistically as opposed to beautifully, they would appear merely repulsive."[23] Abaci is correct to point out that the role of art tends to depict events or objects beautifully despite how they appear in the world or in nature. To further Abaci's claim, consider the following passage:

> The presentation of the sublime (*die Darstellung des Erhabenen*), so far as it belongs to beautiful art, can be united with beauty in a verse tragedy, a didactic poem, an oratorio; and in these combinations, beautiful art is all the more artistic, although whether it is also more beautiful . . . can be doubted in some of these cases. Yet in all beautiful art what is essential consists in the form, which is purposive for observation and judging.[24]

Sublimity is represented in art; however, this does not mean the art evokes the feeling of the sublime. When the sublime is used stylistically, the work of art can be more artistic. However, the sublime in works of art still holds to the condition of beautiful art, namely its form and purpose. This leaves the sublime in the art, when it looks to us like nature, as beautiful or ugly (realistic).[25] Neither of these options evokes the feeling of the sublime and thereby cannot be genuine sublime experiences. Abaci argues, at best, that the mere fact that sublimity is represented in art makes it *impurely* sublime; however, artistic sublimity is inevitably bound to be "mixed up with [the conditions of] beauty."[2627]

Abaci leaves open the possibility that sublimity does not have to be caused by nature; however, anything other than nature must still provide

> The subjectively purposive, negative, and free way in which an object without a purposive form provides the occasion for the free harmony of reason and the imagination even in their conflict. Therefore, any theory of artistic sublimity must also convince us that a work of art can do all this in relation to our autonomy in the way a natural object can.[28]

Paul Guyer, in *Kant and the Experience of Freedom,* denies this possibility, arguing against impure sublimity by denying artistic sublimity altogether. Guyer notes that art does not have the *power* to provide a reflective occurrence:

> Kant does not explicitly deny that a work of art can produce the feeling of sublimity. . . . [H]e seems to assume that a work of art can have some claim to sublimity at least by representing the naturally sublime. Nevertheless works of art seem to have no part in Kant's image of the sublime. . . . [T]the significance of the sublime lies in nothing less than its contrast between the greatest powers of nature and the even greater force of human practical reason. . . . [N]o work of art, even an artistic representation of the sublime in nature can itself stretch our natural faculties as to reveal the even greater faculty of reason that lies beyond them.[29]

Guyer's representational account, like Abaci's, maintains that art can represent the sublime without evoking a genuine feeling of sublimity. For Guyer, there is no place for art in Kant's account of the sublime, even when the sublime

is represented in art. The power of the sublime is an exclusive relationship between the forces of nature and the forces of human practical reason. Guyer argues that art does not have the power to stretch our natural faculties beyond the limits of reason.

Contra Guyer, nature and the imagination does not serve as equal parts; it is only when our imagination demonstrates its limits and inadequacy that we experience the sublime. As Kant notes,

> in the aesthetic judging of such an immeasurable whole, the sublime does not lie as much in the magnitude of the number as in the fact that as we progress we always arrive at ever greater units; the systematic division of the structure of the world contributes to this, representing to us all that is great in nature as in its turn small, but actually representing our imagination in all its boundlessness, and with it nature, as paling into insignificance beside the ideas of reason.[30]

In this passage, Kant indicates that the systematic division of nature consists in infinitely greater units. However, it is only when the boundlessness of our imagination is provoked to conceive of this infinite that the feeling of sublimity is called forth. On this interpretation, the sublime does not necessitate a relation to a natural object. The sublime experience could be evoked by any object when imagination advances to its maximum.

Abaci also misreads the relationship between objects in nature and the sublime, suggesting that "What Kant actually means is that the sublime is found in an object whose form is so difficult or impossible for our power of imagination to render as a perceptual unity that it eventually prompts in us the idea of limitlessness."[31] He goes on to assert that, "If what is truly sublime is found in the mind rather than the object itself, then there is no ultimate ground for distinguishing nature and artistic objects."[32] Abaci does not deny the possibility of artistic sublimity as Guyer does; however, he ultimately thinks that nature's power is what gives "the experience of sublime its distinctive character."[33]

In response, Robert Clewis argues that "the ideas of reason, especially moral ideas, incite the experience of the sublime. We can become explicitly aware of these ideas in response to *art*. Artworks can express moral ideas and move us to reflect imaginatively on these ideas."[34] As Kant puts it,

> What is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though no presentation adequate to them is possible, are provoked and called to mind precisely by this inadequacy, which does allow of sensible presentation.[35]

According to Clewis, the idea of reason is the determining force for the experience of the sublime, making the object of secondary importance.[36] Clewis thus claims that

> What matters is the perceiving subject's vantage point or distance from the object and capacity to reflect imaginatively on a rational idea that the object brings to mind. The sublime is not a function of the object's size or power, this suggests, but of the ideas in the mind. But if this is so, it seems that art can elicit the sublime.[37]

Clewis is correct to reject Abaci's argument that the sublime is found in objects.[38] Kant is explicit that the sublime is a conflict in the mind, caused by objects.[39] However, Clewis exploits the "subject's conditions" while neglecting the sublime's relationship with natural objects (and objects more generally). Kant suggests that the supersensible substrate underlying both nature and thought allows for pure sublimity; therefore, the sublime *does* enter an *agreement* with the natural object, albeit not correspondence (*Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus)*.[40] The ideas of reason are not what elicits the feeling of sublimity but what is revealed through it. As Guyer notes, objects of nature play a vital role by possessing a power to stretch the faculties beyond their limit. Clewis is thus correct that objects themselves cannot be sublime; however, granting the ideas of reason as the primary force for sublimity does not provide a positive thesis that art has the power to evoke the awareness of the supersensible in us the way nature does. Kant is clear that the power of nature provokes the feeling of sublimity:

> Bold, overhanging, as it were, threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, a lofty waterfall on a mighty river, etc., make our capacity to resist into an insignificant trifle in comparison with their power. But the sight of them only becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, as long as we find ourselves in safety, and we gladly call these objects [dynamically] sublime because they elevate the strength of our soul above its usual level, and allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity or resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature.[41]

Or rather, while the "sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form," the intuition of something as fearsome as an ocean's terrible "visage" can place the mind in a "mood for a feeling which is itself sublime."[42]

Both the mathematically sublime and the dynamically sublime cause violence by provoking the thought of the supersensible. The power of nature reveals our physical powerlessness, yet at the same time prompts the imagination to recognize the limits of judgment. Despite our physical powerlessness, our vocation calls forth an awareness of our power apart from nature. As a result, we feel "conscious of being superior to nature within us and thus

also to nature outside us (insofar as it influences us)."[43] By doing so, the mind abandons its sensibility to deal with these ideas. Put simply, natural objects *themselves* are not sublime; yet objects in nature can evoke a mood that then disposes the mind to the feeling of sublimity. Recalling Kant's treatment of the beautiful, it is permissible to call objects in nature beautiful (e.g., a rose is beautiful). For Kant, we call a rose beautiful because we seek the ground of the beautiful outside ourselves, and through our investigation, we expand our understanding of nature. The sublime, on the other hand, only corresponds to nature by providing a "glimpse of magnitude and might. . . . [I]t indicates nothing purposive in nature itself, but only in the possible *use* of its intuitions to make palpable in ourselves a purposiveness that is entirely independent of nature."[44] Clewis gives the impression that the sublime feeling is experienced and executed by the ideas of reason, and he thereby overlooks its agreement with nature. Kant insists that our ideas of reason are revealed to us because of our failure to initially comprehend the magnitude or power of the object in question. Therefore, the relationship between the sublime and sensible nature is significant.

On my view, the agreement with nature provides the framework that allows Kant to assert that the sublime is the "movement of the mind" that relates to the imagination through the faculty of cognition or the faculty of desire. Both faculties remain "In relation to the purposiveness of the given representation."[45] Clewis is correct to argue that a vital feature of the sublime is the movement of the mind; however, this movement remains in agreement to an object conditioned by its purposiveness. For Guyer, pure aesthetic judgments are made in relation to the power of nature, free of determinate ends. Kant maintains the primacy of nature for pure sublimity, but he does not deny a reflective occurrence in exceptional cases of art. For this reason, a further of determination, namely, impure sublimity, permits artistic sublimity without conflating artistic sublimity with natural sublimity, allowing us to maintain a closer reading of Kant.

THE PURE–IMPURE DISTINCTION

I maintain it is an oversight to focus exclusively on *pure* sublimity. Clewis endorses pure artistic sublimity regarding fine art while at the same time maintaining that the pure–impure distinction is helpful for some cases.[46] I argue that Clewis' conception of impure sublimity is ultimately contradictory. Nevertheless, his error guides us in a favorable direction by bringing to our attention the need for principled conditions on impure artistic sublimity.

For Clewis, like Abaci,

> One may ask whether vast works of art can be represented as "mere magnitudes" rather than as objects that bring their ends in themselves, and this may be what Kant has in mind when giving examples from architecture for the mathematical sublime.[47]

The perceiving subject can either look at St. Peter's Basilica as an intentional work of art or, when in its presence, overlook this feature and experience it as "mere magnitude." The subject may unintentionally overlook its determinate end, evoking a sublime experience. It is also possible that the object is monstrous or colossal, thus annihilating the determinate end without being a genuine sublime experience. Clewis is aware that the perceiving subject may just as likely become aware of an object's determinate end, thus rendering the sublime experience *impure*. Clewis believes that, in such cases, an account of impure sublimity would be helpful.[48]

Clewis maintains the pure–impure distinction; however, he contradicts his position when addressing fine art, arguing that

> there are even better examples of artworks that elicit sublimity. In an interesting passage in the fifth section (p. 246), Abaci mentions Frank Stella, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and other artists (Richard Serra comes to mind) whose works function as perceptual settings for the sublime. Such works are not imitations and representations of the natural sublime (as are some works by Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Cole, and Caspar David Friedrich). We can refer to the former as Stella-Serra cases instead of *representing* objects traditionally deemed sublime, Stella-Serra cases *present* or evoke the sublime. Under the right conditions, we can make a judgment of the sublime in response to these works.[49]

If Clewis is correct—and art can evoke genuine sublime experiences and not merely sublime representations—it follows that we can no longer differentiate between artistic sublimity and natural sublimity, nor maintain the pure–impure distinction. Clewis concedes this point, suggesting that

AQ: Please check if the edit to the sentence "If Clewis is correct …" is okay and retains the intended meaning.

> It remains to be shown why the fact that the aesthetic object, the artwork, produced by an artist, *necessarily* limits the capacity of that object to evoke the sublime. . . . I do not see any good reason to presuppose that the phenomenology of the artistic sublimity is necessarily different from that of the natural sublime.[50]

On a charitable reading, Clewis introduces a distinction between pure and impure aesthetic judgments of the sublime. The pyramids of Egypt and St. Peter's Basilica are judged as impurely sublime, and fine art is judged as purely sublime. But it is unclear why Clewis maintains that the former elicits *impure* sublimity while the latter elicits *pure* sublimity. In both cases, the perceiving subject may just as likely become aware of an object's

determinate end, thus rendering the sublime experience impure. Moreover, Clewis pronounces, without limitation, that fine art, despite its admixture of interest, has the same power as nature to elicit sublimity. In doing so, Clewis conflates pure and impure judgments and allows for pure sublimity to be evoked by any object. Despite this inconsistency, Clewis opens the possibility of moving beyond a representational account to consider whether art, despite an admixture of determinate ends, has the power to evoke the sublime experience.

Allan Lazaroff, contra Clewis, marks a decisive difference between art and nature:

> A judgment of taste does not remain a judgment of taste if it loses its purity through admixture with interest. It is then called an empirical or material aesthetic judgment, or an intellectual judgment of adherent or applied beauty if it is based on a judgment of morality which is determinant and interested. A judgment of taste about the beautiful, therefore, is primarily a pure aesthetic judgment which is adulterated so far as it involves interest. A judgment of the sublime, on the other hand, is so called whether or not it involves interest. It is just the pure aesthetical judgment of the sublime which is adulterated by interest. . . . Indeed, most of the occurrences of sublimity in Kant seem to be of this latter impure kind. . . . It will be recalled that one requirement of a pure aesthetical judgment is that the object exhibit purposiveness without definite purpose. Similarly, certain human affections and states of mind are sublime, although, according to Kant, the very concept of man involves his purpose and destination. Since human art also exhibits purpose, only "crude" nature can occasion a pure aesthetic judgment of sublimity and even then nature cannot be viewed teleologically.[51]

Judgments of taste are only pure aesthetic judgments when they are free from interest. Lazaroff emphasizes that art, because it exhibits purpose, cannot be judged as purely sublime. Accordingly, Clewis cannot argue that there are any instances of pure artistic sublimity. However, if art elicits the conflict between the imagination and reason, then we can call these cases impure sublime experiences. In other words, judgments of the sublime lose their purity when they are mixed with interest, yet they remain as sublime judgments. Lazaroff argues that "if, for example, a negative or positive interest is involved, the judgment is no longer a purely aesthetic one, but it remains a judgment of the sublime."[52] This allows for artistic sublimity to move beyond Abaci's representational account without falling into the errors of Clewis' account by conflating artistic sublimity with natural sublimity. Lazaroff holds steadfast to a Kantian account of pure sublimity: pure aesthetic judgments of the sublime are exclusive to raw nature, but this does not efface the possibility of a sublime feeling in the face of some works of art.

In response to Lazaroff, and akin to Clewis, Paul Crowther argues that sublimity "overrides" determinate ends. Through an "overriding transmutation," judgments are made pure. Crowther argues that the experience of sublimity in the presence of works of art or animals can occur despite their determinate ends: "in going on to say why natural objects with a definite end cannot be sublime, Kant makes a move which shows precisely why, in some circumstances, such objects *can* be sublime."[53] For Crowther, the conflict between the imagination and reason presents itself irrespective of interest or teleological considerations. While pure aesthetic judgments are "always restricted by the conditions of an agreement with nature," Crowther argues that what constitutes an "agreement with nature" is left "obscure and unelaborated"; therefore a potential disagreement does not necessarily count as a restriction for experiencing sublimity.[54] As Crowther notes,

> An object is monstrous whereby its size defeats the end that forms its concept. . . . [A]n animal of a definite species could be sublime. It would have to be of so monstrous a size that, psychologically speaking, we are so engrossed in the act of trying perceptually to apprehend its enormity that we pay no attention to (indeed are wholly distracted from) the kind of animal it is. In this case, the animal's very size is "contra-final."[55]

Thus, using this mistake as a framework, Crowther asserts the same is applicable to art:

> Given that a natural object can be sublime despite having a definite end, surely this can also apply to works of artifice—if they are big enough? Kant himself shows the viability of this claim, by inconsistently using works of architecture to illustrate the phenomenological workings of the sublime generally—and not simply of some putatively "impure" mode. . . . When a visitor first arrives at St Peter's in Rome a feeling comes home to him of the inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the idea of a whole within which that imagination attains its maximum, and, in its fruitless efforts to extend this limit, recoils upon itself, but in so doing succumbs to an emotional delight.[56]

Despite Crowther's intentions, the examples showcase the importance of the pure–impure distinction. An account of impure sublimity does not deny nor demote aesthetic judgments of the sublime to a deluded rendition of pure sublimity; rather, it allows further determination for non-paradigmatic cases. St. Peter's Basilica can evoke a sublime feeling because of its magnitude, and if we are overwhelmed by its "monstrous" size, we may forget the determinate end. However, Crowther argues that monstrous objects will "defeat" the end that forms its concept. As a result, aesthetic judgments about art and animals are not "putatively impure" modes of the sublime. Instead, they are the same

as pure aesthetic judgments of the sublime in nature. In one respect, Crowther is highlighting a point akin to Clewis's. Clewis argues that we may unintentionally overlook determinate ends, thus evoking a sublime experience; however, we may just as likely become aware of these ends. For Clewis, this awareness of determinate ends undermines the sublime experience. But Crowther moves a step beyond Clewis's account, suggesting that we can have sublime experiences despite being aware of the artwork's determinate ends. Crowther poses a hypothetical situation:

> Suppose that the visitor to St Peter's studies its architecture and the history of its construction, and those who designed and built it. If he should still feel astonishment, we would perhaps be reluctant to construe the grounds of his response on exactly the lines noted above, because he has been so profoundly imbued with an inescapable sense of its artifice. I would suggest that, in a case such as this, the sense of one's perception being overwhelmed and unable to comprehend the basilica's full phenomenal magnitude remains. . . . [I]t is only in the perceptually overwhelming presence of the object itself that we feel an authentic astonishment at what human creativity can achieve. This harmonious tension between what is perceptually overwhelming and what is nevertheless known to be artifice provides, I would suggest, the basis for one aspect of a specifically artistic sense of the sublime.[57]

In this passage, Crowther considers whether we could still feel the astonishment of St. Peter's after studying its architecture. Crowther is correct that we marvel at great feats of human engineering despite the objects having an admixture of interest. However, it remains unclear how this undermines an account of impure sublimity. When conceiving of impure sublimity as more than representational, we allow for an emotionally moving satisfaction of the sublime in the presence of objects that are monstrous or colossal.[58] As a result, we can regard St. Peter's as sublime without having to argue that the determinate ends are annihilated, only that they go momentarily unrecognized. Bjørn K. Myskja defends this claim by suggesting that

> Kant's reason for using primary examples from crude nature is to avoid misunderstandings, not to label judgements of the sublime in art secondary to those of nature. Thus we have the capacity to make pure aesthetic judgements concerning the sublime in objects of art. There is an important difference between works of art used to exemplify judgements of taste and works of art used to exemplify judgements of the sublime. . . . Thus the two aspects we can judge the object under (as an intentionally purposive work of art and as sublime object), contradict each other. Kant wanted to avoid art and purposive nature when providing examples of the sublime, because in these cases our judgement (understood as the aggregate of our assessments of the work) includes concepts of the purpose

> of the object, contradicting the counterpurposiveness that characterizes the sublime. This problem is relevant even for those movements within modern art that aim to undermine determinable meanings and purposes in the work, e.g., surrealism, the theatre of the absurd, abstract expressionism, including novels such as *Molloy*. Producing a work of art is in itself a purposive action. Using works of art to discuss the judgement of sublimity was even more problematic at Kant's time, when works of art generally were considered to be representations of objects.[59]

Abaci and Guyer are likely to respond, in support of a representational account, by suggesting that, for example, the infinity that is presented in a work of art is merely an illusion. For example, the starry heavens represented in Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* are not infinite; they just *look* infinite. As a result, the artwork may represent the sublime but is not itself the starry heavens that Kant calls sublime. However, Myskja suggests that,

> When an illusion of infinity or overwhelming power is created, the represented object must also be given a physical form which must not only be part of a purposive work of art, but also be a cognitively purposive object for merely reflective judgement. The sublime in representational art must always be both purposive and counterpurposive for cognition, and in this latter aspect must be a purposively created illusion. This explains why Kant found sublime works of art in general not to be suitable examples of the sublime in his exposition.[60]

In one sense, Myskja is willing to accept that "we have the capacity to make pure aesthetic judgements concerning the sublime in objects of art" while, in another sense, "art, in general, is not to be suitable examples of the sublime."[61] Myskja thus goes on to claim that

> Experiencing the sublime in representational art is not in any way ruled out by its unsuitability for didactical purposes, though. Still one can say, as a general rule, that the more aspects an object can be experienced under, the more difficult it is to make a pure aesthetic judgement about it, especially when this judgement requires the simulation of something unlimited within a limited presentation.[62]

Seeing as we do not want to deny the sublime experience described by Clewis and Crowther, one could preserve the feeling of sublimity, according to Myskja, for "didactical purposes." While Myskja will not go so far as to call these impure, he will concede that it makes pure aesthetic judgment more difficult. Thus, Myskja argues that we have the capacity to make pure judgments, yet "the more aspects an object can be experienced under" the harder that becomes.[63] This is inconsistent with Kant's commitment that, as Lazaroff puts it, "a judgment of taste does not remain a judgment of taste if it

loses its purity through admixture with interest."[64] I agree that art, because it is confined to a perceptual form, has a disadvantage in evoking the feeling of sublimity. However, Myskja fails to acknowledge the possibility that works of art do not make pure aesthetic judgments more difficult, but rather make them *impure*.

A PRINCIPLED ACCOUNT OF IMPURE SUBLIMITY

It is clear for Kant that

> purity in the judgments of the sublime is to be found not in art but in nature, indeed, in "crude nature," that is, nature insofar as it does not bring with it the thought of determinate purposes, and in it merely insofar as it contains magnitude.[65]

What "destroys" *pure* aesthetic judgments of the sublime is the intrusion of teleology or an "idea of a purpose." According to Kant, "The sublime must have no purpose whatsoever of the object as its determining ground, if it is to be aesthetic and not mingled with some judgment of understanding or of reason."[66] Put simply, purpose cannot influence the judgment of the object if it is to be *pure*. Allison argues that this is increasingly difficult in cases of art. The conscious awareness of the intention of a work of art, as pointed out by Abaci, may be necessary to appreciate the work of art as beautiful; however, this awareness "is only an obstacle to the pure feeling of the sublime."[67] Allison argues, and I am inclined to agree, that

> It is neither an accident nor a sign of inconsistency on Kant's part that the discussion of the issue of purity follows directly upon the examples of the Egyptian pyramids and St. Peter's. Rather than to present unambiguous examples or paradigm cases of the sublime, Kant's intent is to warn the reader that these examples, which were probably chosen because of their familiarity as illustrations of the sublime, are *not* to be taken as paradigmatic, since the sublime is to be sought instead in crude nature, where one's liking can more easily remain uncontaminated by any thought of purpose. But to claim this is not to deny that one's first experience of St. Peter's, or of many other buildings for that matter, can have about it something of the sublime, which Kant clearly thought to be the case.[68]

In Kant's view, it is possible to have a sublime feeling in the face of the Pyramids and St. Peter's Basilica; yet this judgment remains *impure* because it is mixed with interest—albeit, momentarily unrecognized. My interpretation is supported further by Allison's suggestion that these cases were used

specifically to demonstrate the impurity in some cases and highlight the purity of raw or "crude" nature. However, Allison also reads Kant as warning the reader not to take these examples as paradigmatic.

Building off of Allison's view, then, I argue that the *feeling* of the sublime does not strictly correspond to nature, but *pure* sublimity does. For Kant, pure sublimity is caused by objects that do not bring with them a determinate end; thus only nature can be *purely* sublime. Unlike Allison, I argue that impure sublimity is not merely used to identify the inoperative other of pure sublimity. While nature possesses the power to evoke the feeling of the supersensible better than any other object, the admixture of interest in art does not always prevent the experiencing subject from the sublime feeling. Clewis, Crowther, and Myskja attempt to reconcile the sublime feeling in interested objects with pure sublimity. However, I suggest that a further determination is required—namely, that of impure sublimity. By doing so, I permit artistic sublimity while acknowledging Kant's efforts to prioritize nature. In exceptional cases, art shows the cognizer the inadequacy of the faculty for estimating the magnitude of the things in the sensible world.[69] Allison concedes this point, suggesting that Kant thinks fine art can have a "soul-stirring sensation"[70] and that "there are romantic sublime landscape paintings or Gothic novels" that seem to intend the feeling of sublimity.[71] On Allison's view, fine art moves beyond a representational account and extends to, at the very least, a feeling akin to the sublime. There are other instances where Kant gestures toward artistic sublimity; however, they are rarely accompanied with conditions. For example, in a note appended to paragraph 5: 317, Kant references the famous inscription above the temple of Isis:

> Perhaps nothing more sublime has ever been said, or any thought more sublimely expressed, than in the inscription over the temple of *Isis* (Mother *Nature*): "I am all that is, that was, and that will be, and my veil no mortal has removed."[72]

These examples show that Kant acknowledges a place for the feeling of the sublime in art; however, Kant does not indicate that art should be privileged over nature, nor should objects with determinate ends fit into an account of pure sublimity. Kant is clear that the magnitude and might found in nature allow for the palpable use of the intuitions for the sublime experience. The strength of nature calls forth our independence from it, and this strength is more likely to become known when determinate ends are not exhibited. In other words, because nature is not constituted by determinate ends, it appears free and thus all the more powerful and disorienting to the imagination. Nature, free from determinate ends, allows the cognizer to make pure aesthetic judgments of the sublime. In contrast, impure aesthetic judgments

of the sublime that include the conditions of "beauty and sublimity must be viewed as merely adherent rather than free."[73]

Art cannot be judged as pure sublimity like raw nature; however, in exceptional cases, art provokes an emotionally moving satisfaction.[74] In these cases, art is deemed impurely sublime. Because impure sublimity does not appear to us as beautiful, it is antithetical to an experience of positive free play. Rather, impure sublimity, like pure sublimity, incites violence to the imagination and reason, awakening the supersensible. The pyramids of Egypt and St. Peter's Basilica should not be conceived as merely familiar illustrations of pure sublimity. These examples, among others, indicate that Kant believes there are instances apart from nature that solicit an emotionally moving satisfaction with the character of sublimity. For this reason, I conclude that we should preserve a further determination, calling these instances impure judgments of sublimity. My account preserves a close reading of the Kant's texts, while reconciling his supposed inconsistency. On my account, we allow the possibility for sublime experiences in the presence of art, while retaining their distinction from pure aesthetic judgments, which are based on power and purposelessness.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abaci, Uygar. "Kant's Justified Dismissal of Artistic Sublimity." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 66, no. 3 (2008): 237–251.

Allison, Henry E. *Kant's Theory of Taste: A Reading of the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Clewis, Robert R. "A Case for Kantian Artistic Sublimity: A Response to Abaci." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68, no. 2 (2010): 167–170.

Crowther, Paul. *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Guyer, Paul. "Nature, Art, and Autonomy." In *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality*, 229–274. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Kant, Immanuel. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Translated by Mary Gregor. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Eric Matthews and Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Lazaroff, Allan. "The Kantian Sublime: Aesthetic Judgment and Religious Feeling." *Kant-Studien* 71, no. 1–4 (1980): 202–220.

Myskja, Bjørn K. *The Sublime in Kant and Beckett: Aesthetic Judgement, Ethics and Literature*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002.