

## *The emotional experience of the sublime*

TOM COCHRANE  
University of Sheffield  
Sheffield S3YQB  
UK

### **I Introduction**

The literature on the venerable aesthetic category of the sublime often provides us with lists of sublime phenomena — mountains, storms, deserts, volcanoes, oceans, the starry sky, and so on. But it has long been recognized that what matters is the experience of such objects. We then find that one of the most consistent claims about this experience is that it involves an element of fear. Meanwhile, the recognition of the sublime as a category of aesthetic appreciation implies that attraction, admiration or pleasure is also present.<sup>1</sup>

However, there is also a sense of fear and attraction when we watch car chases or fights. Neither of these is an occasion for the sublime so much as a visceral sort of excitement.<sup>2</sup> As such, I will argue that it is not quite fear, but something that often manifests itself as fear that can be located in our experiences of the sublime. I call this a feeling

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- 1 Henceforth I will use the word 'attraction' to indicate any of these positively valent responses, which are not equivalent but which all generally gear the subject towards increasing the presence of the object in their lives somehow (typically by attending to it more in the cases under consideration here).
  - 2 Cf. James Kirwan, *Sublimity: The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics* (London: Routledge 2005), 162.

of self-negation. This feeling, which comes in a few varieties, may be less physiologically intense than everyday instances of fear. But it has a certain psychological profundity that coheres well with our intuitions concerning the sublime.

Meanwhile, claiming that sublime objects arouse feelings of self-negation rather than simple fear makes our attraction to these objects no less problematic. Note that while it is plausible that our sense of beauty is evolutionarily adaptive, since it attracts us to objects or environments conducive to survival or healthy offspring,<sup>3</sup> the same could not easily be said of the sublime. Mountains, storms, the starry night and so on are in general not conducive to survival. On the contrary, it is quite appropriate that we find these phenomena fearful, horrifying or even monstrous and that we avoid them as much as possible. So to feel any sense of attraction for these phenomena is puzzling.

The goal of this paper then is to provide a plausible account of our emotional experience of the sublime, explaining how the feelings involved are aroused and combined. Clearly this will relate to the more general issue of negative emotions in aesthetic contexts. But given that the dual emotional response is one of the most widely noted features of the sublime experience, we should anticipate something distinctive about it that underlines the distinctiveness of this aesthetic category; something that helps us to understand what our lists of sublime objects have in common. So the most desirable account is not one in which the emotional response to the sublime is identical to our response to horror films, but one in which our emotional responses are intimately bound up with the qualities that distinguish sublime objects.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a direct connection between perceiving the properties of the object and both the feelings of self-negation as well as those of attraction seems available. I shall ultimately favour an account in which our negative feelings are largely the result of imagined physical interactions with the sublime object and where our positive feelings are largely due to imagined possession of qualities analogous to those possessed by the sublime object

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3 A key claim of psychological models of environmental preferences. See especially R. Kaplan and S. Kaplan, *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989).

4 Not least because our response to horror films typically involves an element of disgust that we do not observe in the sublime. Cf. Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall 1990), 240 n. 20, who rejects an identification between the attractions of the sublime and the attractions of horror for largely this reason. Carroll instead argues that the attraction of art-horror is grounded in its stimulation of curiosity (158-94).

(though I will also allow for other, less universal, sources of positive affect).

## II Self-Negation

The briefest perusal of the literature on the sublime suffices to realise the prevalence of appeals to fear. In the earliest 18<sup>th</sup> century accounts, John Dennis talks of 'enthusiastic terror' and Joseph Addison of an 'an agreeable kind of horror'; both men's descriptions of the sublime were inspired by the Alps.<sup>5</sup> Later writers consistently follow suit in this respect if not in others. We find the claim in philosophers as diverse as Shaftesbury, Usher, Burke, Kant, Schiller, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, as well as romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge,<sup>6</sup> the latter providing a memorable description of an experience of the sublime while climbing in the Lake District.<sup>7</sup> The claim has also been preserved

5 John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (London: George Straban 1971/1704), e.g. §137. Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy etc. in the years 1701, 1702, 1703* (Printed for T. Walker, located at <<http://books.google.com>> 19<sup>th</sup> Jan 2010, 1773), 261.

6 Third Earl of Shaftesbury (Anthony Ashley Cooper), 'The Moralists: A Philosophical Rhapsody,' in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Douglas den Uyl, ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Vol. 2 2001/1711), 389-90. James Usher, *Clio: Or, a Discourse on Taste*, third ed. (London, 1772), 110-12. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Located at <<http://www.grtbooks.com>> 19<sup>th</sup> January 2010, 1756): Part 1, section VII in particular. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007/1790), especially §28: 90-1 on the dynamic sublime. Friedrich Schiller, 'Concerning the Sublime,' in *Essays*, Hinderer & Dahlstrom, eds. (New York: Continuum 1993/1801), 74. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover 1966/1818), Vol. I, 224, also 204-5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin 1992/1888), 50-1. William Wordsworth, 'The Sublime and the Beautiful,' from *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, eds. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1974), Vol. 2, 220-2.

7 'My Limbs were all in a tremble — I lay upon my Back to rest myself, and was beginning according to my Custom to laugh at myself for a Madman, when the sight of the Craggs above me on each side, and the impetuous Clouds just over them, posting so luridly and so rapidly northward, overawed me. I lay in a state of almost prophetic Trance and Delight — and blessed God aloud, for the powers of Reason and the Will, which remaining no Danger can overpower us!' Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Letter to Sara Hutchinson 6th August 1802,' in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Earl Leslie Griggs, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000/1802), 841.

by recent analytic philosophers such as Malcolm Budd, Philip Fisher and James Kirwan, amongst others.<sup>8</sup>

Yet although we might accept that fear is a typical element of our response to the sublime, there are scenes traditionally so described which seem only joyful to experience, such as an expansive view of the surroundings from the top of a mountain, or watching the sunrise. In these cases it may still be possible to locate fear within the *narrative* of coming to have those experiences. One may feel fear when looking up at the mountain, or when climbing it, which is transformed to joy when one finally reaches the top and looks out. Similarly in the case of the sunrise one may have a sense of having made it through the night, to have moved from fearful darkness to joyful light. Yet even if we accept this suggestion, the claim for the necessity of fear has become rather weakened. One may only recognize that fear would be an appropriate response to take towards the object, though one has managed to resist or overcome it in some fashion. However, we could also make the stronger claim that the intensity of the fear involved intensifies the experience of the sublime. The presence of a more intense emotion would obviously make the overall experience more intense. But more than that, it could make it more characteristically sublime, on the grounds that sublime experiences are particularly concerned with that tension between the negative and positive qualities of the experience.

When however, we explore in greater detail how our responses may be aroused, it seems more appropriate to describe the necessary element as a sense of self-negation which in certain cases manifests itself in fear. There are two principal routes to this negative affect: a sense of being violently impacted upon and a sense of self-dislocation. I align these different routes with Kant's distinction between the dynamic and the mathematical sublime, where the dynamic sublime applies to extremely powerful objects such as storms and the mathematical sublime applies to extremely large objects such as mountains. Kant grounds his distinction in the different sorts of imaginative failure and cognitive 'compensation' for that failure that we engage in when confronted by these objects. In contrast, I identify phenomenological differences in the temporality of the two experiences, the ways we engage with the object and the sorts of properties we focus on.

Let us begin however, by recalling a few obvious features that are common to both the dynamic and mathematical sublime: First, the

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8 Malcolm Budd, *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003), 83. Philip Fisher, *Wonder, The Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (London: Harvard University Press 1998), 2. Kirwan (162).

physical properties associated with such objects typically lie at the extremes. These include darkness, or bright, fiery colours; very rough or sharp surfaces as well as those that are utterly flat; also (relative) extremes of silence and noise, heat and cold, stillness and movement, complexity and simplicity.<sup>9</sup> These properties are all suited to arouse intense perceptual experiences. Moreover, there is a general association between sublime objects and greatness, in the moral sense as well as the grand, large, or powerful. The conceptual appreciation of greatness (say in a person) is liable to additionally support associations with the above extreme properties.

A second commonality concerns some affects that can occur merely in becoming acquainted with these extremes. When, for example, we are suddenly confronted by a scene of tremendous complexity, intensity or magnitude, we are often momentarily overwhelmed by the task of perceiving the object and gasp as if struck. A comparable experience can occur when we appreciate concepts or theories of great profundity for the first time.<sup>10</sup> There is a feeling of being cognitively impacted upon in a very powerful way. A different way to get at a similar effect is that the extreme properties of sublime objects — their noise or brightness or jaggedness — capture one's attention to such an intense degree that one becomes unreflectively absorbed in the experience. One may then fluctuate between periods of surrender and reflection, and in this way come to appreciate how powerfully one is affected by the object.

What is interesting about both affects is that while concerned only with the *task* of perceiving, they also constitute a feeling or recognition of the overwhelming qualities of the object. They underline both the observation that the experience of the sublime is primarily object-centric and that it involves a sense of self-negation; that perceiving the object makes us feel reduced or overwhelmed. These affects are not regarded as essential to the sublime, yet they are compatible with the more primary feelings of self-negation that I identify, and may indeed encourage or follow naturally from these affects.

It is with regards to the dynamic sublime in particular that fear is most plausibly aroused. The intense roughness, heat, noise, and motion of dynamically sublime objects are strongly associated with danger

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9 While extreme largeness is paradigmatically sublime, extreme smallness is not. Poisonous insects or viruses, despite their highly dangerous nature, are not usually recognized as sublime objects (though see Burke 1756: Part 2, section II), perhaps because they do not perceptually threaten annihilation in the immediate way that storms and volcanoes do.

10 Clearly this is comparable to the Kantian account, though I emphasize the feelings that result here.

and pain since dangerous things often have these qualities. Moreover it seems that we are not merely reminded of pain. When we look at a surface, or hear it being struck, we know what it would feel like to touch it. Empirical studies suggest that this is because cross-modal association is a ubiquitous feature of our perceptual processing.<sup>11</sup> So when we visually or aurally perceive a phenomenon such as a lightning strike, we are apt also to anticipate its felt impact upon our bodies in an attenuated fashion. Moreover sublime objects are associated not so much with specific hurt as with total annihilation. In this way a felt sense of the potentially overwhelming properties of the object accompanies a sense of one's own physical vulnerability or insignificance. This can be regarded as a primary form of the sense of self-negation.

Meanwhile, with regard to the mathematical sublime, the predominant affect seems to be one of alienation rather than fear. As we perceptually explore and reflect upon the sheer breadth of nature before us, a feeling of being lost or absorbed in the environment can result. One could describe it as being imaginatively spread much thinner, to the point of dissipation, as we relate ourselves spatially to what we perceive. An analogous point can be made about ancient objects. We may imagine the duration of time through which they have endured, in comparison to which the highly temporary nature of our own lives or works becomes apparent. Sublime objects do not in general present places in which one can locate oneself, or in which one can imagine flourishing.

Overall, the sense of self-negation is a sense how physically insignificant, or utterly contingent we are in comparison to the object. And this, I claim, is a necessary component of the sublime experience. Although the experience is focused primarily on the object, to see something *as* big or powerful is at the same moment to feel small and vulnerable. Even when looking at the landscape from the top of the mountain, one may feel reduced by the magnitude of the earth. It is the feeling that comes from confronting something inhuman, uncompromising, hostile or just profoundly indifferent. And this can be grasped in a single perceptual experience that startles or overwhelms the spectator, or it can emerge more slowly in contemplation.

Note that this still permits a broad range of experiences which can range significantly in physiological intensity however. As Burke says, the sublime is typically more emotionally intense than the (simply)

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11 There is a great deal of evidence for the pervasive cross-modal processing of the brain. For a review see Asif Ghazanfar and Charles Schroeder 'Is Neocortex Essentially Multisensory?' *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 10 (2006).

beautiful. But in the weakest case one's sense of an object's indifference may amount to nothing more than an odd feeling of dislocation, or a mild sense of being challenged by the environment. Yet due to the involvement of one's sense of self in the ways that have been specified, there is a significant profundity to the experience.

It is for this reason that we should reject the idea that the sublime is a kind of thrill-seeking experience. Although it seems possible to simply appreciate the intensity of the sensations involved, perhaps even feelings of fear, such an explanation would deflate the meaningfulness of the experience. Many of the writers who highlight the presence of fear have also regarded the sublime as a source of value far greater than that of providing enjoyable sensations in the manner of a rollercoaster ride. The sublime is even sometimes regarded as taking the subject beyond ordinary human powers of perception or understanding.<sup>12</sup> While our goal is not to analyse these claims here, we can at least note that a major difference between rollercoasters and the sublime is that even when we are safe, there is a certain reality to sublime experiences. We *really are* tiny and fragile and insignificant in comparison to the sublime object.<sup>13</sup> So the sublime seems to involve an engagement with the world and a potential adjustment of our attitudes towards it that we do not find in purely thrill-seeking experiences. That is, an appeal to thrill-seeking would not properly tackle what has been labelled the self-negating aspects of the sublime experience. Thus whilst we need not deny that people can enjoy mountains and volcanoes and so on in a thrill-seeking way, I suggest that we reserve our category of the sublime for experiences that allow greater potential for attitude adjustment.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Usher (1769, 116) provides a good example of this sort of claim. For a review and sceptical analysis of such claims see Guy Sircello, 'How is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993) 541-50.

13 In natural cases at least. I discuss the derivation of the artistic sublime from the natural sublime in the section on the imaginative identification model below.

14 There is some empirical evidence that high sensation seeking individuals are more likely to report positive emotions having confronted natural physical threats: Agnes E. van den Berg and Marlien ter Heijne, 'Fear Versus Fascination: An Exploration of Emotional Responses to Natural Threats,' *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 25 (2005) 261-72. Yet it need not be the case that sensation seekers are appreciating the negative feelings involved. They may well be more sensitive to one or other of the positive emotions outlined below.

### III Attraction

I have claimed that the properties of sublime objects arouse feelings of self-negation due to a sense of overwhelming impact or more reflective consideration of one's vanishingly tiny substance in comparison to the object. We then find that people are not merely receptive to the kinds of engagement that generate feelings of self-negation, but often actively enhance this experience with the aid of two kinds of imaginative project: imaginative interaction with the sublime object and imaginative recreation of the context. An example of the first sort of project would be to imagine falling from the cliffs that confront you. An example of the second would be to imagine the incredibly slow yet inexorable movement of the tectonic plates that created the mountain range. In general, the function of these imaginative projects is to *amplify* the sublime properties that we perceive.<sup>15</sup> So space seems more vast and remote. The mountain seems craggier. The volcano seems hotter. The key puzzle is then to explain *why* we should engage in such projects, when they only serve to make us seem more fragile or insignificant. We do not enjoy mountains in spite of their hugeness. We enjoy the very hugeness of them; the bigger the better!

By way of approaching the solution that will ultimately be proposed here, it is helpful to examine the range of solutions that have already been proposed in the philosophical literature. The alternatives can in general be divided into two overarching categories — egoistic and non-egoistic — where egoistic accounts tend to locate something positive about the self in contrast to the admittedly unwelcome qualities highlighted by the object, and non-egoistic accounts tend to question whether the experience of self-negation is so terrible after all. There are also variations in whether attraction can be found in a reflective concept of oneself, or whether it is more intrinsically involved in the sensations of experiencing the sublime object. Furthermore, I must qualify that writers often appeal to some combination of the alternatives presented here (though to my knowledge there are no alternatives that do not belong to one or more of the possibilities I outline). But note that the goal here is not to fully engage with the nuances and complexities of the various historical accounts. Several excellent reviews of particular accounts have already been offered recently elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> Instead the

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15 Cf. Emily Brady, 'Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature,' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56 (1998) 139-47.

16 E.g. Richard Shusterman, 'Somaesthetics and Burke's Sublime,' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 45 (2005) 323-41. Rachel Zuckert, 'Awe or Envy? Herder contra Kant on



goal is to survey the available alternatives, focusing on their psychological plausibility and compatibility with the phenomenological considerations outlined above.

### *The Relief Model*

First, on what can be called the relief model, our knowledge that we are safe from the threat of the sublime object permits us not just to tolerate it, but to take pleasure in the feeling that we have not in fact been overwhelmed. So we are led to imagine pain or danger which, with relief, we find is not actual. Burke is well known for this idea, as is Addison. Burke also describes relief as a 'negative pleasure,' which is more intense than simple pleasure because it is relevant to our most vital concern for self-preservation. He thus takes most seriously the aversive nature of the sublime object and provides a psychologically plausible source of pleasure, even if his detailed physiological explanations are at times rather unlikely.<sup>17</sup>

Now to explain why we don't simply avoid the sublime object completely, the relief theorist must claim that negative pleasure is most pronounced when set in contrast. We could not consistently claim that relief and fearful tension are experienced concurrently, but we can conceive the overall experience as a mixed emotion in which one moves from one state to the other successively. That is, our feelings fluctuate as we engage more directly with the object, resulting in tension, followed by a re-appreciation of our safety, which seems all the more valuable in contrast. Yet, even given this interpretation, the relief model remains unsatisfying. It states that to gaze upon an erupting volcano is not rewarding. The reward is rather in the reflective appreciation of one's safety. This, though perhaps possible, does not seem to capture the characteristics of the sublime experience described above, where to be in thrall of the object, and even to amplify its qualities, is the focus of the experience we value. Moreover, we can question the common assumption that although the sublime object is feared, one must actually be safe. It seems possible to me that one is facing some definite danger, for instance when traversing a narrow mountain path, and yet

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the Sublime,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61 (2003) 217-32. Also see Budd and Kirwan.

17 See Shusterman for a review, as well as Vanessa Ryan, 'The Physiological Sublime: Burke's Critique of Reason,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001) 265-79. Both authors rehabilitate Burke's idea that physiological explanations can be usefully applied to the sublime.

still capable of appreciating the sublime immensity of one's surroundings. Naturally there are degrees of safety, and some people may be able to psychologically tolerate greater levels of potential danger than others. Yet so long as one is not immediately caught up with saving one's own skin, actually being safe might not be as important as having the ability to tolerate feelings of fear.<sup>18</sup> As such, a feeling of relief may not be triggered, since the danger, though somewhat at arm's length, can be ongoing.

In general, the relief model emphasizes that fear or pain is necessary for the sublime, but seems to erroneously assume that such negative affect must exclude any concurrent positive affect. While relief is incompatible with fearful tension, there are varieties of attraction involving greater stimulation instead. Moreover, apart from the possibility of simultaneous pleasure and (in this case imagined) pain, the exact qualities of fear involved need hardly be so unpleasant that its absence would create much of a sensation of relief, or indeed that any relief is demanded at all.

#### *The Heroic Model*

A closely related alternative to the relief model locates attraction in the overcoming of our aversion, what we may call the heroic model. This idea coheres well with the earlier suggestion that the sublime view from the top of a mountain may still be embedded within a fear narrative. The claim is that we enjoy our capacity to engage with the sublime object, providing an enhanced recognition of our powers. And since many recognised cases of the sublime require only that the subject perceive or contemplate the object, it is usually our perceptual or cognitive powers that are at stake here. This sort of account is very popular and varieties can be found in many of the 18<sup>th</sup> century accounts of the sublime. For instance John Baillie writes that since we suppose ourselves to be 'present' to the things that we perceive, the 'great part of the elevation raised by vast and grand prospects, is owing to the mind's finding herself in the exercise of more enlarged powers, and hence judging higher of herself.'<sup>19</sup> Taking a different tack towards the same conclusion, Hume remarks in the *Treatise of Human Nature* that the 'opposition' or challenge of comprehending the vast spatial or temporal distances

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18 Cf. Shusterman (341).

19 John Baillie, 'An Essay on the Sublime,' printed in *Art and Enlightenment: Scottish Aesthetics in the 18th Century*, Jonathan Friday, ed. (Imprint Academic 2004/1747), 90.

exemplified by sublime objects generates an 'invigorating' sense of our mental strengths.<sup>20</sup> This appeal to the appreciation of cognitive powers then finds perhaps its most sophisticated formulation in the *Critique of Judgement*, where Kant argues that it is precisely the inadequacy of imagination or sensibility to fully grasp the object that allows the far greater powers of reason and moral vocation to be discovered:

Sublimity, therefore, does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind, in so far as we may become conscious of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us.... Everything that provokes this feeling in us, including the *might* of nature which challenges our strength, is then, though improperly, called sublime, and it is only under presupposition of this idea within us, and in relation to it, that we are capable of attaining to the idea of the sublimity of that being which inspires deep respect in us, not by the mere display of its might in nature, but more by the faculty which is harboured in us of judging that might without fear, and of regarding our vocation as sublimely exalted above it.

Although the reasoning or psychological routes taken towards the positive side of the sublime differ in these accounts, they are all basically compatible with the relief model in their endorsement of a psychological claim that we take pleasure in the promotion of the self. Their actual conceptions of self (e.g. the Kantian versus the Humean view) may differ, but the egoistic nature of the psychological story is the same.

It is, however, precisely the egoistic nature of such attraction that is questionable. My concern here is not that it might be morally suspect, but that it does not properly accommodate the phenomenology of the sublime experience. Like the relief model, we may worry that the heroic model ignores the distinctly other-directedness of the sublime experience. While this model may apply well to a pleasure taken in scaling the mountain, or weathering the storm, most examples of the sublime focus on the initial confrontation with the sublime object. It is the experience when the mountain towers before you, when the lightning strikes, when the stars remain cold and distant, that is at the heart of the sublime experience. These experiences are more consistent with a continued appreciation of one's insignificance, rather than a sense of heroism. True, one has managed to withstand this confrontation, but at

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20 *A Treatise of Human Nature*: Book 2, part III, section VIII. Note, however, that Hume's remarks are too brief to be considered a fleshed out theory of the sublime. For discussion see Justine Noel, 'Space, Time and the Sublime in Hume's *Treatise*,' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 34 (1994) 218-25. See also the accounts of Dennis, Hutcheson, Gerard, and Usher (helpfully surveyed in Kirwan, 7-12).

the same time one should sense that to come closer would be devastating. So in many cases, a sense of heroism would be a rather ridiculous attitude to take, and certainly vulnerable to collapse. And although Kant's appeal to an indestructible soul allows him to justify the sense of superiority to nature, it does not seem that those of us who admit the dependence of our minds upon the fragile integrity of our bodies are thereby unable to enjoy the sublime.

Again it seems that because we are in thrall of the mountain, that we commonly describe the object as sublime rather than ourselves. Contra Kant, this does not seem to be the result of a misplaced causal attribution, but a sincere appreciation of the superior physical properties of the sublime object. Moreover the heroic model does not explain the ways in which our attraction is guided by the particular properties of the sublime object (apart from the mere fact that we withstand them). While one's sense of fear could be directly sensitive to the various threatening features, the enjoyment of one's powers is at best third hand; a response to the awareness of overcoming one's fear. In contrast we may think that our attraction to sublime properties is a little more immediate than this. With pleasure or wonder we trace the fiery, jagged rocks in the volcano.

As such, I suggest that egoistic models of our attraction to the sublime are unlikely to be widely applicable, and that our preferred account should be based as much as possible in the immediate appreciation of the object's qualities. The following three non-egoistic models, the last of which I prefer, seem to more closely approach this ideal.

#### *The Humble Model*

First, in direct contrast to the heroic model we have what we might call the humble model. This model affirms the insignificance we feel in comparison to the sublime object, but questions the assumption that this is automatically a bad thing. Malcolm Budd briefly articulates a view like this where he argues that by diminishing oneself, one's worries may be equally diminished.<sup>21</sup> By absorbing oneself in the sublime, one can forget the petty struggles of the world for a while. The sublime is thus a sort of escape from oneself or one's everyday life.

We actually see a similar point in Kant when he claims that nature 'summons our power ... to regard as small those things of which we are inclined to be solicitous (worldly goods, health, and life).'<sup>22</sup> It is notable,

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<sup>21</sup> Budd, 84-6

<sup>22</sup> Kant, 92

however, that for Kant, humility is treated as a means to moral perfection, which is the true object of the positive experience of the sublime.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, I am interested here in a more pure, and perhaps more unusual case of humility, in which there is no trace of hostility or desire to overcome the sublime object. Rather, it is precisely the overpowering nature of the sublime object that one is attracted to.

This account thus articulates a particularly close connection between the positive and negative aspects of the sublime experience. It is uncertain whether one must first experience self-negation *as* negative, and then realise its positive side (as Budd supposes) or whether one's original experience of being over-powered is a positive one. An advantage of the second case would be to allow the overall experience to be less self-conscious and thereby more closely bound up with appreciating the qualities of the sublime object. In either case however, there is an emotional narrative here comparable to relief. With an attractive sense of release or escape from mundane concerns, one embraces the superiority of the sublime. Another consideration in support of this model is that reports of sublime experience typically focus on the solitary individual. Although it may be possible to jointly enjoy a sublime experience (not counting cases where the *object* of the experience is social, e.g. a massive crowd or inspiring speaker), being with others does not in general seem conducive to the experience. Perhaps this is because such contact is too ordinary, or too distracting; one must be removed from ordinary social concerns to appreciate the sublime.

Yet by itself the humble model does not seem very convincing. We can agree that the sublime may take you 'out of yourself' for a while, and this is something attractive. But the question is, *why* is it attractive? If the motivation is simply to forget one's worries, then it looks like beautiful scenery would serve just as well. But the humble model implies that one is attracted by the sheer 'otherness' of the sublime object, which should be so extreme as to be hostile to the self. By appealing to a relief-based emotional narrative, the humble model implies that one must be sufficiently troubled or jaded by everyday life before confronting the sublime object. But must it *necessarily* be unpleasant to be oneself for one to be attracted to the sublime object? This is not very plausible. Or at least, I do not think we have located the heart of the attraction involved — where there is something positive about

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23 'Even humility, taking the form of an uncompromising judgement upon his shortcomings ... is a sublime temper of the mind voluntarily to undergo the pain of remorse as a means of more and more effectually eradicating its cause' (Critique of Judgement §28: 94).

the qualities of the sublime object with which one's positive response (attraction, attention) is intimately bound up.

*The Admiration Model*

While the humble model seems like a possible way to appreciate non-egoistically the sublime object, we should seek a more universal explanation of the attraction involved. As such, an alternative view is that while a sense of the superiority of the sublime object is maintained, we appeal not to relief as the key psychological mechanism at work, but rather joy in the contemplation of the object's superiority. Johann Herder takes this route by identifying the sublime experience with admiration. As quoted and analyzed by Rachel Zuckert:

'The emotion with which one feels oneself to be smaller than the sublime is not the gnawing of envy, but a heavenly breeze that lifts us up and strengthens us.' Why, Herder asks, should admiration be described as painful? Why should it not be a truthful recognition of our place in the whole of nature, the world, and culture (of which any individual is, in fact, a part, less than the whole)?<sup>24</sup>

So when we are confronted by the sublime we are inspired by its greatness. The sublime object exerts a pull on our imagination, showing how great the world can be. The logic of admiration also applies particularly well to ascribing sublimity to people or works of art. It emphasises that the experience of the object is itself uplifting.

However, one of the advantages of the egoistic accounts was that we had an easy way to explain what makes the sublime attractive; they reinforce the subject's perception of his own powers, (and presumably feeling powerful is something we like to experience). In contrast, the attraction involved in the experience of admiration needs some elucidation, particularly where the object of admiration is in fact contrary to one's physical well-being and has, we have supposed, aroused feelings of self-negation. One plausible suggestion is that when one admires a powerful person (even when that person presents a threat) one's attraction resides in one's idea that one would like to be allied with that person, to possess their qualities, or even to *be* that person. The closeness sought by the pull of attraction lies at the level of psychological identification rather than spatial closeness. Could the same thing be said of

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24 Zuckert (2003): 225, in reference to Johann Herder, *Kalligone* in *Werke* Vol. 8. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1998/1800), Vol. 8, 890. Cf. 891 and 893-4.

sublime objects? In effect, are we attracted to sublime objects because we want to be like them, or for them to be somehow 'on our side'?

In order to make sense of this desire, we need some account of how one could possibly be like the sublime object, or wield its powers, even if only in one's fantasy — or else why does the sublime object not arouse a sense of hopeless inferiority? It would be odd to desire the literal properties of the mountain or storm. But we can appeal to a more abstract understanding of sublime properties. If we possess general concepts of properties like solidity or power, these can be relativized against our prior first-person experiences of physical resistance or destruction on a more modest scale. We can then desire to be as impervious as the mountain or as destructive as the storm rather than a massive lump of granite or a discharge of electrical energy.

The admiration model might then be supplemented with the kind of overcoming narrative explored above. By conquering the sublime object one might hope to gain analogous qualities. Herder himself suggests something like this: By scaling the mountain, one literally raises oneself to a great height. This confers metaphorical excellence as elevation is related to goodness. But it also proves one's freedom of movement, and confers practical excellence due to one's ability to see further at the summit. It is less easy to see how the same logic could apply to our attraction to storms or glaciers or deserts however. Perhaps one copes well in a desert or glacier scenario by adopting an attitude of extreme patience and stillness, analogous to the stillness of these environments. And in the case of storms we have the example provided by Act III, scene ii of *King Lear*, in which, while weathering the storm, King Lear exemplifies its violence (we might more typically run for cover in such situations, but these are not relevantly sublime cases). Yet although intense activity may help one to physically cope with the storm, in what sense would it be appropriate to feel *violent*? Moreover, must we suppose that one is motivated to attend to, or engage with, sublime objects because one wants to feel the qualities required to cope with them? This seems a little too self-directed, and as such too indirect to explain our attraction to the sublime. Preferably we should explain as directly as possible why we just like to gaze upon sublime objects, and how they manage to inspire us.

As such, while I think the admiration model is on the right track with respect to our regarding the sublime object as truly a great thing, the route to admiration outlined here does not provide a psychological account that can plausibly be applied to all cases. Moreover, if we make sense of feelings of admiration by appeal to an underpinning desire for properties like those possessed by the sublime object, we encounter the same problem of over self-directedness that we found in the egoistic models. So although I would allow that the admiration model, like

the other models, is psychologically coherent and therefore possible, it does not show how sublime properties can be simply enjoyed for their own sake. Achieving this, I claim, is a key virtue of the last account which I will now present, and which I favour. It is largely because this last account explains how sublime properties can be directly enjoyed that makes it more universally *applicable* to the wide variety of cases that fall under the category of the sublime.<sup>25</sup> As I shall note, there is some precedence for this model in other writings. However, I hope to provide a fuller picture of the psychological mechanisms involved than has previously been offered.

### *The Identification Model*

I suggest that our capacity to admire sublime objects, and to sincerely value their greatness for their own sake is due to a direct psychological transmission of sublime qualities that does not rely on any sense of 'earning' those qualities or otherwise physically interacting with the sublime environment. On this model we imaginatively identify with the properties of the sublime object. The basic idea is that closely attending to the properties of the sublime object encourages one to subtly take on properties analogous to those perceived. To give a simple example, one looks at the mountain and takes on analogous features by standing tall and still and tensing one's muscles.<sup>26</sup> This could also (and perhaps more commonly) happen at a purely neural level; the brain generates a map of the bodily state *as if* it has taken on such properties.<sup>27</sup> In either case, the feelings of such properties are then generated, even if only to

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25 Though not strictly necessary. I do not want to dogmatically insist that every single case across the long and varied history of this phenomenon does admit the greatness, or value for its own sake, of the sublime object. I just think it is vastly more common that we do, especially in contemporary times.

26 Cf. Gregory Currie, 'There is the sense of having your body disposed in a way which resembles (perhaps minimally) the geometry of the object viewed, and the dynamical relations to other things its position suggests, as one imagines standing upright supporting a heavy load, in response to the sight of a load bearing column, or imagines swaying in the wind like a tree.' Currie derives his discussion from the notion of *empathy* advanced by Theodore Lipps and others. Gregory Currie, 'Empathy for Objects,' in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

27 It is a central feature of feed forward models of motor planning that we can model bodily states triggering efferent feelings independently of actual bodily changes, allowing one to evaluate the likely affects of that behaviour. For example I may imagine running for the bus to help me decide if it is worthwhile making the effort. E.g. Susan Hurley, 'The Shared Circuits Model (SCM): How Control, Mir-



an attenuated degree. The attraction of such experiences should then be clear. It is pleasurable to vicariously experience the qualities of power or magnitude, the solidity of the mountain or the aloofness of the stars.

Now in so far as I intend imaginative identification to be applicable to all cases of the sublime, I cannot plausibly assert that it is always, or even usually, a deliberate activity.<sup>28</sup> But it seems quite possible for the activity to be triggered sub-personally. It thus bears some resemblance to the kind of 'low-level' mental simulation outlined by Alvin Goldman.<sup>29</sup> Normally, simulation is conceived as a means by which one empathises with other people. By mirroring certain mental or behavioural states of the other, and then allowing one's normal cognitive or emotional mechanisms to process these states as if they were one's own, output states are generated which one is then able to attribute to the other. With regard to aesthetic appreciation, simulation has been employed by several theorists to account for our reactions to depictions of human figures, as well as the imagination of actions that could have led to the creation of the object.<sup>30</sup> However, as Currie has recently put it, the case we are concerned with here would exemplify a distinctive broadening of the notion because it is the object itself that is empathised with, rather than any supposed maker.<sup>31</sup>

By what mechanism could such mirroring of the properties of the sublime object occur? It was noted above that our admiration of sublime properties require that we possess general concepts of these prop-

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roring, and Simulation Can Enable Imitation, Deliberation, and Mindreading,' *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 31 (2008) 1-58.

- 28 However, the experience may well be intensified by deliberate imaginative engagement. Compatible with the idea that one can lose oneself in contemplation of the sublime, one could imagine *being* the sublime object. A monumental object like the starry sky might even encourage one to imagine the entire universe as a unified substance, where one visualises this substance as somehow infused with one's sense of first-person consciousness. Cf. Romain Rolland's idea of 'oceanic feeling' discussed in Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton 1962), 11-20.
- 29 Alvin Goldman, *Simulating Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), Ch. 6.
- 30 E.g. Gregory Currie, Gregory and Ian Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2002). Paul Noordhof, 'Expressive Perception as Projective Imagining,' *Mind and Language* 23 (2008) 329-58. David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, 'Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience,' *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11 (2007) 197-203.
- 31 Since this is a broadened notion of simulation I would be very wary of appealing to any supposed basis in mirror neurons — neurons that fire both when we observe another person engaging in an action and when performing the same action ourselves.

erties that can be relativised against our prior first-person experience. In a related fashion, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson are well known for arguing that our concepts are broadly rooted in sensorimotor experience.<sup>32</sup> The commonality of anthropomorphic metaphors (a calm sky, a violent storm) indicates a tendency to model these phenomena on a human scale. Moreover, various empirical studies suggest that concepts activate related physiological activity and sensorimotor areas of the brain, and also that conceptual thinking can interfere or support sensorimotor activities (and vice versa).<sup>33</sup> These various lines of evidence suggest that we intuitively conceptualize the properties of the sublime object in ways that can potentially be mirrored. Second, we have already supposed that a certain degree of imaginative engagement is likely on the part of the subject as he or she tries to better appreciate the nature of the sublime object. This, combined with the awareness of one's safety, or the ability to tolerate a certain degree of danger, can dispose one to imaginatively simulate sublime properties from a first person perspective in order to fully recognize their negative impact. Finally, the mere fact that one is paying concentrated attention to the sublime object enables such imaginative processing to flourish. Thus it is likely that bodily feelings of power, solidity or aloofness can be called up quite automatically as we closely attend those same qualities expressed to an extreme in the sublime object.

Perhaps the plausibility of this account is best demonstrated by seeing how one may deliberately engage in the kind of imaginative identification outlined above. Imagine that you are looking at an ocean, stretching as far as the eye can see in all directions. The ocean seems utterly expansive and unchanging, in relation to which you are vanishingly remote and tiny. Now concentrate on this quality of expansiveness. What is this quality like exactly? Can you imagine the ocean depths swelling and stretching across the earth? The more you concentrate on this quality, the more you should sense a feeling that seems to replicate it (of one's body swelling and relaxing — though one's attention should be focused on the imagined object), and this is hopefully quite an attractive experience. Naturally, merely imagining such an

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32 E.g. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1980).

33 E.g. L.W. Barsalou, W.K. Simmons, A.K. Barbey and C.D. Wilson, 'Grounding Conceptual Knowledge in Modality-Specific Systems,' *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2003) 84-91. Vittorio Gallese and George Lakoff, 'The Brain's Concepts: The Role of the Sensory-Motor System in Conceptual Knowledge,' *Cognitive Neuropsychology* 22 (2005) 455-79. T.W. Schubert, 'Your Highness: Vertical Positions as Perceptual Symbols of Power,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (2005) 1-21.

object lacks the confrontational aspect that we find in the direct perception of sublime nature, where self-negating aspects cannot be so easily ignored. As such the profundity of such an experience is less easy to convey. But the directness with which we may enjoy the properties of sublime objects is hopefully apparent.

The same process seems applicable to non-natural cases of the sublime. We can imaginatively identify with skyscrapers or pyramids in the same way as we can with mountains, since the claim is that we identify with properties (such as largeness) that these objects have in common. Figurative art also, to the extent that it gets us to imagine the relevant natural cases, seems to fit well with an account appealing to the imagination of properties. The account also seems straightforwardly applicable to powerful people, especially since the need to translate the sublime properties onto a human scale is obviated in such cases.

The case of abstract arts is more difficult. Although certain sublime properties, such as obscurity, can be literally possessed by abstract art works, and so confronting such works can stimulate us to imagine such qualities,<sup>34</sup> the sublimity of a Rothko painting, or a Wagner symphony is less straightforward. A complete discussion of the sublimity of such cases is beyond the scope of this essay. However, my main approach is to argue that the sublimity of abstract arts is the result of *expressing* the kinds of properties that natural cases of the sublime literally possess. For instance, an abstract painting may capture sublimity because it makes us imagine craggy textures, intense heat, or solidity, even though it does not possess these properties itself. Similarly, a piece of music can express a powerful movement or destructive natural forces even though it does not literally move in such ways.<sup>35</sup>

James Kirwan has also offered an account that is similar to this identification model, though there are some significant differences.<sup>36</sup> To

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34 E.g. by imagining qualities of impassiveness, inscrutability to others, unworldliness, or indifference. Tony Smith's six foot steel cube 'Die' is a good example of this sort of sublimity. For discussion, see Paul G. Beidler, 'The Postmodern Sublime: Kant and Tony Smith's Anecdote of the Cube,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (1995) 177-86.

35 Cf. accounts of emotional contagion by music such as Stephen Davies, 'Infectious Music: Music-Listener Emotional Contagion,' in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, Peter Goldie & Amy Coplan, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011).

36 Kirwan, 163-4. Cf. also Herder, 'Our feelings naturally correspond to, even reflect the properties of object: in seeing a wide calm sea, we have feelings of breadth and calm; in seeing high waves or towering trees, we feel uplifted' (Zuckert, 221, in reference to Herder, 876 and 892-3).

explain why the experience of identification is not typically explicitly recognized, Kirwan appeals to an interpretation he describes as 'reminiscent' of a Freudian desire. He suggests that the sublime experience serves a deep sub-conscious desire to be immortal or invulnerable. This motivates us to imagine possessing the properties of the sublime object. But our awareness of the unreality of such feelings causes us to 'project' them outwards. We interpret our feelings as mere recognitions of the properties of the sublime object, so that in general we describe the object as sublime rather than ourselves. Moreover, the qualities we feel *must* be projected onto the object in order to persist, since were we to recognize their source in an irrational desire, the illusory feeling of greatness would be shattered and we would no longer find the object sublime.

I do not follow Kirwan in describing the process of identification as an illusion, nor need we appeal to hidden psychological egoism in order to explain the reward. There is a difference between employing certain mechanisms in getting a feeling of the sublime object's properties and such systems going on to alter one's beliefs. The kind of identification described above does not require one to imagine *that* one is a mountain, or like a mountain, though the sensual character of the experience could lead to such an activity. The sublime is not even like the Müller-Lyer illusion, where one perceives that one line is longer than the other despite a reflective belief that they are equal. There need be no conflict in one's beliefs because while focusing one's attention on the object, enjoying certain feelings of power or immensity can be a way to appreciate the object's actual properties, a way that simply uses feeling rather than sight or hearing. As Currie notes, we need not believe that the mountain *feels* itself to be solid. Rather, our feeling of solidity is epistemically like the heat felt when touching a radiator; something we attribute to the object of our attention. Unless we reflect on the experience, we do not experience the heat of the radiator as something caused *in us* by the radiator. Most immediately we just experience the heat as a property of the radiator.

Note, however, that while I have construed this process as a low-level and typically automatic mechanism comparable to perception, it is by no means required that one have a particularly accurate idea of how powerful or large the sublime object is. One need only recognize that it is 'very' powerful, or 'much more powerful than me.' This lack of accuracy is mostly due to our imagining qualities that have been translated onto a humanly appreciable scale. Strictly speaking then, one only has a quasi-perceptual appreciation of the qualities of the sublime object. Moreover, should one gain conceptual knowledge that provides a more realistic picture of the object's scale, this could intensify the sublime experience both in negative and positive respects because it allows one

to realize how one's naïve imaginative projects have failed to live up to that scale, as well as push one to scale up one's imagined sense of the qualities in question (though again, these are unlikely to be very accurate).

So the process of adopting properties analogous to those possessed by the object can be a means to more vividly grasp the object's properties, enabling us to relativize the object's properties against our own in a way that is reasonable, if not particularly accurate. Again, if this process is pleasurable, then that need not indicate we are pleased with ourselves.<sup>37</sup> One might selfishly seek out sublime objects for the pleasure one gets in contemplating them, or one may just find oneself struck by a vision of the sublime. But Kirwan confuses a pleasure that results from certain cognitive mechanisms which cause us to feel powerful and enduring, with pleasures resulting from the contemplation of certain facts, i.e. *that* we are powerful and enduring. Needless to say, we are not really as enduring as mountains. To feel a sense of self-negation in response to sublime objects is justified. We really are physically insignificant in relation to these objects. But because of the mechanisms of recreation, the relation can inspire and delight us, rather than arouse overwhelming horror.

#### IV Re-Introducing Self-Negation

Finally, we must combine this account of attraction with our earlier account of self-negation. Recall that to sense the power or hugeness of the sublime object is to sense our own insignificance, or pathetic capacities to resist; it is a contrast relative to our own powers. Yet if this is the correct way to describe the power of the object, how does it square with the idea that the experience makes us feel *more* powerful? How could one feel insignificant and powerful at the same time? It was claimed above that the sense of self-negation results in part from a cross-modal feel of the properties we perceive. The object's properties either seem to impact upon one like an external force or constitute a context against which one's dimensions are contrasted. The identification model, in contrast, implies that one feels a kind of empathy for these properties, as if one is connected to the object, rather than struck by it.

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37 There is a parallel here with vicariously enjoying the success of another person. While psychologically, we may get a sense of reward because the feelings of power or success are 'internally' experienced, the conscious or reflective attitude accompanying this need not be framed in terms of enjoying one's own success.

To elucidate this duality, we must reiterate the components of the sublime experience. There is a tension within the experience between the sense of self-negation and the celebration of the object, upon which the intensity of the experience may be grounded. Most immediate is the sense of self-negation which results from being perceptually overwhelmed in various ways by the properties of the object: its vastness, power, solidity and so on. If we are to appreciate the sublime however, we must learn to tolerate this self-negation, due either to a realisation of our safety or an ability to disassociate from our feelings of aversion. And (again contra Kant) we must achieve at least some sensuous grasp of the properties of the object. This allows us to contemplate those very same properties that generated the sense of self-negation, leading us to automatically replicate their qualities in our imaginations and to generate the corresponding feelings. The pleasure of such feelings then allows us to account for the attraction we have to the sublime while preserving the self-negating and object-centric nature of the experience.

Now in both cases one's cognitive system employs mechanisms that translate between different sensory modalities. Moreover both tendencies are basically physiologically compatible with respect to generating arousal. But identification involves an additional transposition of properties to the human scale and this transposition can also renew one's appreciation of the *negative* impact of the sublime object. For example, one compares the quasi first-personal feeling of the hardness of the rock to the properly first-personal feeling of the softness of one's flesh and accordingly re-appreciates one's comparative weakness. In this way one can oscillate between two different perspectives on the same property. This seems to be as unified an experience as we can expect while maintaining that the experience has both genuinely positive and genuinely negative aspects (i.e. where the negative aspects are not enjoyed in a masochistic way).

Compare this dual perspective to empathy, where, for example, we can have a vivid sense of the anger that another shows toward us while feeling fearful at the same time, and as a consequence. In this way it is possible for a person to have two quite conflicting sorts of feeling (of aggression and submission, or power and weakness) within the same psychological episode. The difference is that when confronting an angry person, my feelings of fear may predominate and trigger avoidance behaviours, whereas when confronting the sublime, my feelings of attraction and self-negation remain in balance, or in favour of attraction, at least for the duration of the experience.

## V Conclusion

Overall, the imaginative identification model properly respects the object-focused characteristics of the sublime experience and the feelings of self-negation involved. The phenomenology of both self-negation and attraction can be located in our appreciation of the sublime object's properties without requiring artificial or irrational self-reflections. In this way, the model retains a sense of the meaningful value of the sublime object as magnificent and overwhelming, relative to which one is vulnerable or insignificant.

Moreover, the imaginative identification model seems superior to other accounts of the positive feelings of the sublime because it is more universally applicable to the wide variety of cases that fall under this category (nature, people, artworks). There are several reasons for this. First, the fairly low-level perceptual and physiological interpretation of imaginative identification that has been offered is cognitively undemanding enough to apply to all cases. The experience can be generated automatically as one contemplates the sublime object's properties. Second, although the mechanistic description I have provided is somewhat complex, the experiential upshot is a simple appreciation of the qualities of sublime objects for their own sake. It is a minimal common thread to the lists of sublime objects is that we recognize the greatness of these objects (though perhaps historically this was not always the case). Imaginative identification best explains how we manage to recognise this greatness — we are able to contemplate these objects in an empathetic way.

Thus imaginative identification seems the most likely common core of our positive experiences of the sublime, though I would not rule out the possibility that people sometimes experience positive affect along the lines proposed by other models, and so I do not demand that every historical instance of an experience of the sublime must necessarily involve imaginative identification. However it is another virtue of the imaginative identification account that it is compatible with the other positive accounts of the sublime that have been detailed. It is quite possible that — having enjoyed the greatness of the sublime object's properties — one also then take a heroic or humble attitude towards the sublime, or form a desire to be actually like the object, or experience relief from its negative impact. The account also allows that the subject engage in supplementary imaginative projects such as recreating the historical context of the sublime object, the extent of the scene that he or she cannot currently perceive, or to actively imagine 'merging' with the object.

Because the identification account gets at a minimal core of the appreciation of the sublime, it leaves one's longer-term attitude towards the

sublime fairly open. How we ultimately manage to reconcile ourselves with the indifference and vastness of the universe is a larger concern that is unfortunately beyond the scope of this essay. But at least our capacity for imaginative identification provides a means by which we can take pleasure in the sublime, potentially helping us to feel connected to the wider world, rather than alienated from it.<sup>38</sup>

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