

**Imagining Freedom:
Kant on Symbols of Sublimity**

Samantha Matherne (UC Santa Cruz)

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§1. Introduction

My main focus in this paper is on the role that the imagination plays in Kant's theory of the sublime.¹ However, before turning more directly to the details of Kant's view, it may be helpful to situate his discussion within the broader context of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.² Kant's treatment of the sublime occurs in the first half of the third *Critique*, the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment," in which he analyzes a special class of judgments, viz., aesthetic judgments. Unlike cognitive judgments, which are grounded in the object, Kant claims that aesthetic judgments are grounded in our awareness of how the object affects us, i.e., in the feeling of pleasure or displeasure it gives rise to in us (see, e.g., KU 5:203). He, in turn, devotes sustained attention to two types of aesthetic judgments: judgments of the beautiful and judgments of the sublime.

Although judgments of the beautiful and the sublime share many similarities (e.g., they involve disinterested pleasure, the free play of mental faculties, and a claim to universal and necessary validity),³ at the outset of the Analytic of the Sublime, Kant also emphasizes the differences between the two. To begin, Kant argues that each judgment involves the exercise of different *mental capacities*: while they both involve the imagination, in judgments of the beautiful, the imagination relates to the understanding, whereas in the sublime, the imagination relates to reason.

Second, Kant maintains that these two judgments involve a different *phenomenology*. Whereas judgments of the beautiful are entirely pleasurable, Kant claims that judgments of the sublime involve "negative pleasure" (KU 5:245). The pleasure is 'negative' because the objects involved in judgments of the sublime are either so large or so powerful that when we initially encounter them, they overwhelm us, exposing our limits and inadequacies as sensible creatures (KU 5:245). Our experience of the sublime thus commences with a feeling of displeasure. It is only once we

¹ For the purposes of this paper, I will focus only on Kant's account of sublimity in nature, setting aside the vexed issues surrounding the possibility of artistic sublimity (see, e.g., Abaci (2008), (2010); Clewis (2010)), as well as the category of the moral sublime discussed by Clewis (2009): Ch.2, §3 and Merritt (2012).

² References to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are to the A and B pagination of the first and second editions (**A/B**). All other references are to the volume and page of *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. **Prol**: *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*; **Gr**: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*; **KpV**: *Critique of Practical Judgment*; **EE**: First Introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*; **KU**: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*; **WRP**: "What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made in Germany?"; **Rel**: *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*; **MM**: *Metaphysics of Morals*; **Anthro**: *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*; **LM**: *Lectures on Metaphysics*.

³ See, e.g., KU 5:244, 247.

subsequently realize that reason within us is elevated above anything sensible that the initial displeasure gives way to a feeling of pleasure in the sublime.

A third way in which judgments of the beautiful and sublime diverge is with respect to *predication*. According to Kant, it is appropriate to call objects in nature ‘beautiful’ because they have a form that is purposive with respect to our imagination and understanding. In a judgment of the sublime, by contrast, he claims that it is not correct to call the object ‘sublime’ because it “appear[s] in its form to be contrapurposive for our power of judgment, unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and as it were doing violence to our imagination” (KU 5:245). Instead of the object, Kant claims that what is “properly sublime” is something with us (KU 5:245).

With this basic framework in this place, we can now proceed to an analysis of the contribution the imagination makes to judgments of the sublime. In describing the imagination’s role, there is a tendency among commentators to think that, for Kant, the imagination plays a wholly *negative* role in judgments of the sublime.⁴ On this interpretation, in the sublime, we experience displeasure when very large or powerful objects outstrip our imaginative capacities, thus uncovering our inadequacies as sensible creatures; it is reason alone that is then credited with the pleasure that we feel, as it elevates us past the limits imposed upon us by our imaginations.

However, as a number of other commentators have recognized, this negative interpretation appears to be in conflict with some of Kant’s more positive remarks about how the imagination is enlarged in the sublime. He says, for example, in §27 that the sublime involves “the necessary enlargement of the imagination to the point of adequacy to that which is unlimited in our faculty of reason” and in the General Remark that the imagination “acquires an enlargement and power” in the sublime when it serves as “an instrument of reason and its ideas” (KU 5:259, 5:269). This line of thought suggests an alternative *positive* interpretation of the imagination’s role in the sublime, according to which the imagination is not just humiliated, but also expanded and empowered in these judgments and that this, in turn, contributes to the pleasure we feel.⁵

⁴ See, e.g., Matthews (1996): 169-171, 175, 177; Allison (2001): 315, 326; Kirwan (2004): 62-3, 77; Abaci (2008): 240; Merritt (2012): 39; and Doran (2015): 239.

⁵ See, e.g., Makkreel (1984), (1990): Ch. 4; Gibbons (1994): Ch. 4; Pillow (2000): Chs. 3-4; Guyer (1993): Ch. 7, (2005): Ch. 9; Clewis (2009): 79-83; Brady (2013a): Ch. 3, (2013b); Budd (2002): 82fn 12. While Lyotard (1991) also addresses how the imagination is expanded in the sublime, he does so in a way that downplays the positive contribution reason makes. Crowther (1989): 132-3 notes that Kant makes some scattered remarks about a positive, primarily aesthetic role for the imagination in the sublime; however, he argues this is something that remains ambiguous in Kant’s account given his primary interest in the connection between sublimity and morality.

In what follows I aim to further develop the positive interpretation by situating it within Kant's general theory of the imagination as a faculty of presentation [*Darstellung*].⁶ Doing so, I argue, reveals that the imagination makes a positive contribution to the sublime and our pleasure therein because it enables us to treat objects in nature as a symbolic presentation of what in us is properly sublime, viz., our vocation as free and moral agents.⁷ More specifically, I claim that on Kant's view the imagination encourages us to treat very large objects as a symbol of the greatness of our vocation and very powerful objects as a symbol of the might of this vocation. What is more, I show that insofar as Kant connects this vocation to our freedom, the imagination contributes to Kant's overall efforts in the third *Critique* to explain how the "great chasm" between nature and freedom can be overcome, helping us treat nature as a symbol of our freedom and sublimity within (KU 5:195).

Although my goal is to bring out the imagination's positive role, I do not mean to deny that it is also the source of the displeasure we feel, so I begin in §2 with a discussion of Kant's analysis of the imagination's negative contribution to judgments of the sublime. I then turn to the imagination's positive contribution and since my interpretation of this feature of his view hinges on his theory of presentation and symbolism, in §3 I examine his detailed explanation of these topics in §59 of the third *Critique*. In §4 I apply this framework to his discussion of the role the imagination plays in judgments of the sublime, arguing that it produces presentations that serve as symbols of our moral vocation. In §5 I show that on account of the purposive nature of these symbolic activities, the imagination helps give rise to the pleasure we feel in the sublime. I conclude in §6 by exploring how the imagination's exercise in the sublime contributes to bridging the gap between nature and freedom.

§2. Imagination and Displeasure in the Sublime

⁶ The majority of commentators who have noted the relevance of the notion of presentation and the sublime do so in their analysis of the connection between sublimity and Kant's doctrine of aesthetic ideas, e.g., Crowther (1989): 155-161; Gibbons (1994): 139-143; Pillow (2000): Ch. 3; and Doran (2015): 280-285. Exceptions to this include Guyer (2005): 229, 230 and Brady (2013a): 77, who allude to presentation in the sublime in its own right. While there are fruitful connections to be made here, I think that in order to fully appreciate the relationship between aesthetic ideas and sublimity, we need to situate it within the broader framework of symbolic presentation (here I differ from Pillow (2000), (2001) who distances Kant's account of aesthetic ideas from symbolism). I take steps in this direction below by analyzing this broader framework and its application to sublimity; however, the topic of aesthetic ideas is not one I pursue further here.

⁷ Insofar as I emphasize the idea that sublime is a symbol of morality, my interpretation is in the spirit of the interpretations offered by Guyer (2005): 227-230 and Clewis (2015) and I intend to provide further support for this approach by offering, as neither Guyer nor Clewis does, a detailed analysis of how the imagination produces symbols in the context of the sublime.

In this section, I want to concentrate on the connection Kant draws between the imagination and the displeasure that we feel in the sublime. To this end, Kant emphasizes the idea that we experience very large or very powerful objects in nature as displeasing because they are *contrapurposive* with respect to the imagination. As we saw him make this point above, these objects appear ‘unsuitable for’, even ‘do violence to’ the imagination (KU 5:245). Furthermore, on Kant’s view, this contrapurposiveness manifests in different ways depending on whether the judgment at issue is a judgment of what he calls the ‘mathematically’ or ‘dynamically’ sublime. Whereas judgments of the mathematically sublime are responsive to extremely large objects and involve a relationship between the imagination and theoretical reason, judgments of the dynamically sublime concern extremely powerful objects and in them the imagination relates to practical reason. Let’s consider the negative role the imagination plays in each of these judgments in turn.

In the mathematically sublime, Kant indicates that the imagination’s contrapurposiveness manifests itself in its cognitive efforts toward the “aesthetic estimation” of the magnitude or size of an object (KU 5:251). On his view, we can estimate the magnitude of an object in two ways: either through mathematical estimation in which we numerically measure the object, e.g., I measure a tree to be eight feet tall with a measuring tape, or through aesthetic estimation in which we measure something “by eye,” e.g., I estimate how large a tree is just by scanning its height with my eyes (KU 5:251). And it is in the imagination’s efforts toward the aesthetic estimation of very large objects that Kant suggests that it becomes frustrated, indeed, twice over.

To begin, Kant claims that in order for aesthetic estimation to be possible, the imagination must engage in two perceptual activities: ‘apprehension’ [*Auffassung*] and ‘comprehension’ [*Zusammenfassung*] (KU 5:251-2).⁸ In apprehension, the imagination takes up an object part by part, e.g., if I am looking at a tree from bottom to top, my imagination first takes up the tree’s roots, then its trunk, and finally its branches. Meanwhile in comprehension, I represent those apprehended parts together in a single whole, e.g., I combine the representations of the roots, trunk, and branches together into a representation of the tree as a whole. On Kant’s view, it is only if we both apprehend and comprehend an object that we will be able to aesthetically estimate how large it is.

⁸ In contrast with Makkreel (1984) who argues that the comprehension Kant describes in the third *Critique* (see, e.g., KU 5:251-2) differs from his analysis of the synthesizing activities of the imagination in the first *Critique*, I take apprehension in the third *Critique* to map onto what Kant calls the synthesis of apprehension in the A Deduction (A98-100) and comprehension to map onto the combination of the synthesis of apprehension and reproduction, which results in the formation of an image, i.e., a holistic representation of an object we perceive (A120-1). For a lengthier discussion of the imagination and image-formation in perception, see Matherne (2015).

Although normally in perception we are able to accomplish both apprehension and comprehension, Kant claims that when we encounter extremely large objects, our imaginations hit a barrier: though we can apprehend them part by part, we cannot comprehend them. In his words, when apprehension has gone so far that the partial representations... that were apprehended first already begin to fade in the imagination... then it loses on one side as much as it gains on the other, and there is in the comprehension a greatest point beyond which it cannot go (KU 5:252).

In order to illustrate the failure of comprehension, Kant uses the example of entering St. Peter's for the first time: although we can successively apprehend the various parts of it, e.g., the sculptures, mosaics, columns, altars, etc., we fail in our attempts to comprehend it because St. Peter's is so large we cannot combine the representations of the parts together into a representation of the whole.⁹

When this happens, Kant claims that,

there is a feeling of the inadequacy of [one's] 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 (KU 5:252).

By Kant's lights, this example points toward one of the ways in which extremely large objects can give rise to displeasure in us: they are so large they contravene the imagination's attempts to comprehend them and their contrapurposefulness in this regard is something we experience as displeasing.

However, Kant argues that there is a further way in which the imagination contributes to displeasure in the mathematically sublime, viz., when it fails to meet a demand of theoretical reason to produce a comprehensive representation of the infinite. According to Kant, when we attempt to aesthetically estimate very large objects, we feel that they are so large that the only standard or "basic measure" by which they could be measured is by nature as an "absolute whole" or "absolute totality," i.e., by nature as infinite (KU 5:257, 255). And it is at this point that reason becomes relevant to aesthetic estimation because Kant claims that it demands that the imagination produce a comprehensive representation of nature as infinite:

the voice of reason... requires totality for all given magnitudes... hence comprehension in **one** intuition, and it demands a **presentation** for all members of a progressively increasing numerical series, and does not exempt from this requirement even the infinite (space and past time), but rather makes it unavoidable for us to think of it... as **given entirely** (in its totality) (KU 5:254).

⁹ I am here using the St. Peter's example only to illustrate what happens when we fail at comprehension; I leave aside whether this example has implications about the possibility of the sublime in art.

As he makes this point in §27, “the idea of the comprehension of every appearance that may be given to us into the intuition of a whole is one enjoined on us by a law of reason” (KU 5:257). So, on Kant’s view, reason demands that the imagination form a comprehensive representation of nature as an absolute, infinite whole. However, he claims that in this the imagination is doomed to failure: given that the idea of infinity is a supersensible idea, hence something that “admits of no intuition,” the imagination cannot produce a comprehensive intuition of it (KU 5:255). This points to a second way in which the imagination is frustrated: it cannot live up to the demands that reason places on it, and this only deepens the displeasure we experience in the mathematically sublime.

While Kant is explicit about the inadequacy of the imagination in the case of the mathematically sublime, the role the imagination plays in the dynamically sublime can be more difficult to detect. Indeed, some commentators have gone so far as to suggest that the imagination does not play a significant role in the dynamically sublime at all.¹⁰ However, since in his general analysis of judgments of the sublime in §23 Kant is clear that they involve a relation between the imagination and reason, it would be blatantly inconsistent if the imagination did not play a role in the dynamically sublime. Fortunately, Kant provides us with enough hints to reconstruct his view.¹¹

Recall that in the dynamically sublime, the imagination is brought into relation with practical reason, i.e., “the faculty of desire” (KU 5:247). In general, when discussing the imagination in a practical context, Kant treats the imagination as the source of our idea of well-being or happiness. As we see in the *Groundwork*, for example, Kant defines happiness as the concept of “a maximum of well-being, in my present and every future condition” and he claims that this is “not an ideal of reason, but of the imagination, which rests merely on empirical grounds” (Gr. 4:418).¹² Kant takes up this idea in his analysis of the imagination in the dynamically sublime, claiming that when it comes to “our feeling of well-being... the imagination, in accordance with the law of association, makes our state of contentment physically dependent” (KU 5:269). As Kant indicates here, in its practical function, the imagination projects an idea of our happiness as something that is physically dependent, e.g., on riches, health, long life, etc. This, in turn, bears on the faculty of desire insofar as happiness is an end that we as ‘dependent’ and ‘finite’ beings desire (see Gr. 4:416, KpV 5:25). In its practical exercise, then, the imagination articulates and projects the end of happiness that we, as finite creatures, strive for.

¹⁰ Crowther (1989): 119-120, Myskja (2002): 139-141

¹¹ The reconstruction I provide here owes much to Clewis’s (2009): 79-80 insightful discussion of the connection between the imagination and happiness as it bears on the dynamically sublime.

¹² See also KU 5:430, MM 6:452, KpV 5:61.

Having established that in the dynamically sublime, the imagination operates as the source of our idea of happiness, we can tease out why Kant's thinks very physically powerful objects in nature would be experienced as contrapurposive with respect to this. According to Kant, when confronted with physically powerful objects in the dynamically sublime, although we are not actually afraid of these objects,¹³ we nevertheless represent them as fearful: "we merely **think** of the case in which we might wish to resist [the object] and think that in that case all resistance would be completely futile" (KU 5:260). For example, as I watch a raging sea from the safety of my car, I could imagine a case, me in a dinghy, in which any attempt to resist those crashing waves would be futile. When we imagine such a case, Kant claims that it "make[s] us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness" (KU 5:261).

This, in turn, bears on the issue of contrapurposiveness because in imagining such a case, we imagine the object as something that is contrapurposive with respect to the end of happiness that our imagination's project. That is to say, insofar as the imagination projects our happiness as a state that depends on the achievement of physical things, in an imagined scenario in which a very powerful object makes us feel physically powerless, we would not, in fact, be able to achieve this end. When I, for example, imagine myself in the dinghy, then the powerlessness I feel in the face of the raging sea threatens my ability to acquire the riches, health, long life, etc., that I imaginatively project as requisite for me attaining the end of happiness. On Kant's view, we will accordingly experience these very powerful objects as contrapurposive with respect to our imaginative projection of happiness because they threaten our ability to achieve this end. Had the imagination not projected our happiness as something that is dependent on physical goods, then we would not experience these objects as contrapurposive. However, since it has done so, when very powerful objects threaten our ability to achieve these goods, we will experience them as contrapurposive with regard to this imaginatively projected end. For Kant, it is this experience of objects as contrapurposive with respect to our imaginative projection of the end of happiness that ultimately gives rise to our displeasure in the dynamically sublime.

In both judgments of the mathematically and dynamically sublime, then, we experience the relevant object as contrapurposive with respect to our imagination, either in its cognitive or practical exercise. Hence Kant's claim that, "The feeling of the sublime is thus a feeling of displeasure from

¹³ On Kant's view, if we were actually afraid, then we would not be able to engage in the sort of reflection required for aesthetic judgment (see KU 5:260-1).

the inadequacy of the imagination” (KU 5:257).¹⁴ And it is in light of these considerations that it can be tempting to think that, for Kant, the imagination plays a wholly negative role in judgments of the sublime. However, as I mentioned in the introduction, this interpretation is at odds with Kant’s more positive claims about the enlargement and empowerment of the imagination in judgments of the sublime. Thus in order to do justice to Kant’s analysis of the imagination’s role in the sublime, we cannot just address its contribution to our displeasure, but also need to analyze its more expansive, positive role.

§3. The Imagination As the Faculty of Presentation

In order to fully appreciate the imagination’s positive contribution to the sublime, I believe that we need to situate it within Kant’s more general analysis of the imagination as a faculty of presentation or exhibition [*Darstellung*]. Kant characterizes the imagination in this way throughout the third *Critique* and his treatment of it in the *Analytic of the Sublime* is no exception.¹⁵ Indeed, he introduces the imagination in these terms, saying that in the sublime, “the faculty of presentation or the imagination is considered, in the case of a given intuition, to be in accord with... reason, as promoting the latter,” and this is a theme he develops over the course of the *Analytic* (KU 5:245). Given that he is thinking of the imagination as a faculty of presentation in the context of the sublime, I want to raise two questions: first, what does Kant mean by describing the imagination as a faculty of presentation, and, second, how does it operate as such in judgments of the sublime. I will address the first question in this section and the second in §4.

Kant’s most thorough discussion of presentation in the third *Critique* is found in §59, “On beauty as a symbol of morality.”¹⁶ There, he describes a presentation as an intuitive representation of a concept. In his language, a presentation is an intuition that involves the *Versinnlichung*, the ‘making-sensible’ or ‘sensible rendering’ of a concept.¹⁷ He, in turn, delineates two types of presentations: schematic and symbolic.

A schema, on his view, is a ‘direct’ and ‘demonstrative’ presentation of a concept (KU 5:352). Now, at first blush, given Kant’s consistent emphasis on the difference between intuitions

¹⁴ Kant makes this claim in the context of the mathematically sublime but for reasons discussed above I think it can be extended to the dynamically sublime as well.

¹⁵ For other passages in which Kant aligns the imagination with the faculty of presentation see, e.g., EE 20:220, 221, 224; KU 5:192, 232, 233, 244, 245, 251, 253, 254, 257, 258, 274, 279, 314, 315, 317, 326, 327, 343, 366; and Anthro §§28, 38. See Henrich (1992): 47-49 for a discussion of the development of Kant’s use of *Darstellung*.

¹⁶ Kant offers a very similar view in his essay “What real progress has metaphysics made in Germany?” (1793) (20:279-280).

¹⁷ Guyer and Matthews use the former translation at KU 5:351 and the latter at KU 5:356.

and concepts, it might seem odd for him to claim that a schema, qua an intuitive representation, can directly present a concept. However, I think that we can make sense of the directness of this relation if we concentrate on the connection Kant draws between direct presentations and the notion of demonstration. In the first Remark to the Antinomy of Taste, Kant describes demonstration as follows:

Concepts of the understanding must, as such, always be demonstrable (if by demonstrating, as in anatomy, it is merely **presenting** [*Darstellen*] that is understood); i.e., the object that corresponds to them must always be able to be given in intuition (pure or empirical)... Thus one says of an anatomist that he demonstrates the human eye when he makes the concept he has previously expounded discursively intuitable by means of the dissection of this organ (KU 5:342).

As we see in this passage, on Kant's view, to demonstrate a concept means to present the object that corresponds to that concept in intuition. And his mention of anatomy is instructive: the anatomist demonstrates the concept of the eye by means of the intuition of the dissected eye, which presents the object that corresponds to that concept. Notice that in order for this to count as a demonstration, the *content* of the concept must directly map onto the *content* of the intuition. In the anatomy case, for example, in order for the dissection to count as a demonstration, the content of the concept of the eye, e.g., the intellectual representation of 'an almost spherical globe made up of the eyeball and optical nerve', must directly map onto the content of the intuition of the dissected eye, e.g., the spatio-temporal representation of the almost spherical globe made up of an eye ball and an optical nerve that is on the anatomist's table. Accordingly, in order for an intuition to count as a demonstration of a concept, it must *directly* present the *content* of that concept in intuition. Applying this to Kant's account of schemata, his idea is that a schema is a direct presentation of a concept in the sense that the content of the intuition maps onto the content of the concept in the way required for the former to count as a demonstration of the latter.

Kant offers his most extended discussion of schemata in the so-called Schematism chapter of the first *Critique*, where he focuses, in particular, on what he calls 'transcendental schemata' (A137/B176-A147/B187).¹⁸ For Kant, a transcendental schema is a direct intuitive presentation of a

¹⁸ At the outset of §59, Kant says that an intuition that demonstrates the reality of the "pure concepts of the understanding... are called **schemata**" and that a presentation is "**schematic**, where to a concept grasped by the understanding the corresponding intuition is given *a priori*" (KU 5:251). While this suggests that all schemata are *a priori* representations of the categories (i.e., the transcendental schemata at issue in the first *Critique*), I do not think Kant is committed to this. For in the "What real progress" essay, Kant offers a broader definition of schemata: "If objective reality is accorded to the concept directly (*directe*) through the intuition that corresponds to it, i.e., if the concept is immediately presented, this act is called schematism... [This] occurs with concepts of the sensible" (WRP 20:279). So understood, a schema in the broadest sense is the presentation of concepts that refer to something sensible and these

pure concept of the understanding, i.e., a category. More specifically, he claims that a schema involves a ‘time-determination’ [*Zeitbestimmung*] that directly presents the category in temporal terms (A139/B178). Again, it may seem odd that Kant claims a category, qua a pure concept, can be directly presented through a schema, qua an intuitive representation; however, he takes this to be the case because he thinks that the content of the former maps onto the content of the latter. In fact, on Kant’s view, the content of the transcendental schema is derived from the content of the category insofar as the former is something that imagination produces by applying the category to the *a priori* manifold of time:

The schema of a pure concept of the understanding... is... a transcendental product of the imagination, which concerns the determination of the inner sense in general, in accordance with conditions of its form (time) in regard to all representations, insofar as these are to be connected together *a priori* in one concept in accord with the unity of apperception (A142/B181).

On Kant’s view, then, a transcendental schema is a time-determination in the sense that it is the result of the imagination having determined the *a priori* manifold of time in light of the content of the categories. In the case of cause, for example, the intellectual content of the category of causality is “something follows something else in accordance with a rule,” and when the imagination applies this category to the *a priori* manifold of time it produces a transcendental schema, the content of which is “in time something follows something else in accordance with a rule” (A243/B301).¹⁹ Insofar as the content of this schema derives from the intellectual content of the category, the former qualifies as what Kant defines as a direct presentation or demonstration of the category.

In contrast with schematic presentations, Kant argues that the second kind of imaginative presentations, i.e., symbolic presentations, can only present concepts in an ‘indirect’ fashion “by means of an analogy” (KU 5:352). As is standard, on Kant’s view, an analogy is something that involves a comparison between two things; however, in §59 he argues that an analogy turns not on any similarity in the ‘content’ of the compared things, but rather on the “form of reflection” that

concepts can either be *a priori*, i.e., the categories, or empirical. Indeed, it is only if this is Kant’s view that we can make sense of the fact that in the Schematism in the first *Critique*, he addresses both transcendental schemata and sensible schemata associated with mathematical concepts and empirical concepts (A140-1/B180).

¹⁹ Kant sometimes phrases this point in terms of the order of a manifold, his idea being that whereas the intellectual content of the category of cause involves something following something else in a manifold in accordance with a rule, the content of its transcendental schema is “the succession of the manifold insofar as it is subject to a rule,” where succession is here understood temporally (A144/B183).

they elicit in us (KU 5:351).²⁰ That is to say, in symbolic presentations, unlike in schematic ones, the content of the intuition need not directly map onto the content of the concept; what is needed, instead, is that how we reflect on the former maps onto how we reflect on the latter.²¹ Consider, for example, the first stanza from Elizabeth Bishop's poem "Sonnet" (1928):

I am in need of music that would flow
Over my fretful, feeling fingertips,
Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,
With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.
Oh, for the healing swaying, old and low,
Of some song sung to rest the tired dead,
A song to fall like water on my head,
And over quivering limbs, dream flushed to glow! (Bishop: 214)

On a Kantian analysis, the analogy between water and music that Bishop employs does not depend on any literal similarity between water and music, but rather on the fact that the way we reflect on both, on how they flow, cool, calm, etc., is similar. More technically, although the content of the intuition of water does not directly map onto the content of the concept 'music', the way we reflect on the former parallels how we reflect on the latter. On Kant's view, it is in virtue of this analogy that water can serve as a symbol, an indirect presentation, of the concept of music.²² A key part of Kant's analysis of symbols, then, is that they involve intuitive representations that present concepts in this indirect, analogical way.

However, Kant furthermore argues that in an analogy the intuitive symbol is something that *encourages* reflection on the concept. In his words, analogies prompt the "transportation of reflection on one object of intuition [i.e., the symbol] to another, quite different concept, to which perhaps no intuition can ever directly correspond" (KU 5:353). I take Kant's idea to be that insofar as an analogy compares a symbol, which is often more concrete and familiar, with a concept, which is often more abstract and obscure, it encourages us to parlay our reflective acquaintance with the former into a deeper understanding of the latter. In the Bishop poem, for example, while the

²⁰ Making the same point from a different angle, in the *Prolegomena*, Kant claims that an analogy "does not signify... an imperfect similarity between two things, but rather a perfect similarity between relations in wholly dissimilar things" (Prol. 4:457-8).

²¹ This somewhat oversimplifies Kant's view of qualitative analogies for as he indicates elsewhere, e.g., A179/B222, Prol. 4:358fn, LM 28:292, an analogy involves four terms, $a : b :: c : d$, and the similarity in how we reflect on the two sets of terms is grounded in the similarity in the ground-consequence/cause-effect relation that holds between the terms (see KU 5:464fn).

²² To use one of Kant's own examples, a handmill (think of a spice grinder) can serve as a symbol of a despotic state: "between a despotic state and a handmill there is, of course, no similarity, but there is one between the rule for reflecting on both and their causality" (KU 5:232). That is to say, the way we reflect on the mechanical causality involved in a handmill is similar to the way we reflect on the mechanical causality involved in a despotic state.

concept ‘music’ can be difficult to describe, by drawing on our reflective awareness of something commonplace like water, Bishop encourages us to think of music in a way that promises to enrich our understanding of it.

For Kant, this feature of analogies is particularly significant when it comes to ideas of reason, like God and the immortal soul, for, on his view, these can *only* be presented symbolically. As supersensible concepts, he claims that the ideas of reason are ‘indemonstrable’, i.e., that “no intuition adequate to them can be given at all” (KU 5:342, 351).²³ Thus Kant maintains that the only way ideas of reason can be presented is symbolically, in virtue of an analogy that encourages us to draw on our reflective familiarity with an intuitive symbol in order to think about a supersensible idea.²⁴

In light of these considerations, I believe we can tease out two conditions that an intuitive representation must meet in order to count as a symbol. The first condition, call it the ‘*indirectness condition*’, is that the content of the intuitive representation does not literally or straightforwardly map onto the content of the concept it symbolizes. The second condition, call it the ‘*reflection condition*’, is that the pattern of reflection elicited by the intuitive representation is similar to and encourages us to engage in the pattern of reflection called for by the concept. It is in virtue of meeting these two conditions that an intuitive representation can serve as a symbol.

To be sure, in §59 Kant’s primary aim is to argue that, “the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good [*Sittlichguten*]” (KU 5:353). Kant’s basic idea is that although our intuitive representation of a beautiful object, e.g., a beautiful sunset, does not literally or straightforwardly map onto our representation of the morally good, hence it meets the indirectness condition, nevertheless the way we reflect on it is similar to and serves as a stimulus for how we reflect on the morally good, hence it meets the reflection condition.²⁵ However, since our primary interest in §59 is answering the question of what Kant means by characterizing the imagination as a faculty of presentation, what we have found is that as a faculty of presentation, the imagination is responsible

²³ For Kant’s discussion of ideas of reason in the third *Critique*, see his first Remark to §57 (KU 5:341-4).

²⁴ See, e.g., Kant’s analysis of the symbolic presentation of the idea of God in §§57-8 of the *Prolegomena*.

²⁵ More specifically, Kant adduces two common features of how we reflect on the beautiful and morally good: first, he claims that in both cases we are “aware of a certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere receptivity for a pleasure from sensible impressions,” and, second, that we “esteem the value of others in accordance with a similar maxim of their power of judgment” (KU 5:353). For example, just as when I reflect on a beautiful sunset, I am aware that my pleasure in it is not determined by my senses, but rather claims to be universally valid for all human beings, so too when I reflect on the morally good I am aware that that my will is not wholly determined by the senses, but rather by the moral law which has universal validity for all rational beings. Moreover, according to Kant, our reflection on beauty as a symbol of the morally good is something that encourages us to develop reflective patterns that are conducive to morality; hence his claim at the end of §59 that, “Taste as it were makes possible the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest without too violent a leap” (KU 5:355).

for producing intuitive representations of concepts, which render those concepts in sensible terms. This can happen either through schematic presentations, which directly demonstrate concepts, or through symbolic presentations, which indirectly present concepts by means of an analogy. While this answers the first of our two questions above, we now need to address the second question, viz., what role does presentation play in the imagination's contribution to the sublime?

§4. Symbolic Presentations of Sublimity

As I noted above, throughout his analysis of the sublime, Kant consistently draws on the idea that the imagination operates as a faculty of presentation and he does so in two veins. On the one hand, returning to the issues addressed in §2, Kant connects the displeasure we feel in the sublime to the idea that very large or powerful objects are contrapurposive because they are “unsuitable for our faculty of presentation, and... do violence to our imagination” (KU 5:245). In the case of the mathematically sublime, Kant claims that the imagination is frustrated in its efforts at “presenting the idea of a whole,” whether this whole is a very large object or the absolute whole of nature (KU 5:252). Meanwhile in the case of the dynamically sublime, insofar as we experience the object as something that would render us physically powerless and so threaten our ability to acquire the physical goods we imagine we need to be happy, it interferes with the imagination's attempts to present us in a state of happiness or well-being.

On the other hand, in this section, I hope to show that there is a way in which the imagination's activity of presentation is, in fact, *promoted* in the sublime, viz., when the imagination treats objects in nature as a symbolic presentation of what in reason is properly sublime. And in order to motivate this aspect of my interpretation, I want to begin with an important passage that occurs in Kant's introduction to judgments of the sublime in §23:

we express ourselves wholly incorrectly if we call some **object of nature** sublime... We can say no more than that the object serves for the *presentation of* a sublimity that can be found in the mind; for what is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason (KU 5:245, my emphasis).

What this passage suggests is that although an object in nature is not itself sublime, nevertheless we can treat it as a *presentation of* what in the mind is properly considered to be sublime. Since we know that the imagination is the faculty of presentation, this passage indicates that in the sublime the imagination produces a presentation of what is properly sublime. This, in turn, raises two questions: first, what does the imagination present as properly sublime, and, second, is this presentation a schematic or symbolic one.

4.1 Sublimity, Proper

It can be challenging to identify exactly what Kant thinks the imagination is to present as properly sublime. Even restricting our focus to the *Analytic of the Sublime*,²⁶ we find Kant identifying the mind,²⁷ reason,²⁸ ideas of reason,²⁹ our vocation,³⁰ and a disposition of the mind³¹ as what is properly sublime. Though there is truth to each of these characterizations, in what follows, I argue that what is primarily at issue for Kant is the sublimity of our vocation [*Bestimmung*], where this vocation is practically understood as something that is grounded in practical reason and involves our autonomy.³² In defending this interpretation, my position contrasts with two other trends in the secondary literature: first, with interpretations according to which it is only the dynamically sublime, not the mathematically sublime that has a practical orientation, and, second, with interpretations according to which it is only negative, not positive freedom that is revealed in the sublime. Thus my aim in this section is not only to bring to light the centrality of our vocation to Kant's account of the sublime, but also to argue for a practical conception of it, as a vocation that is grounded in practical reason and requires our autonomy. In order to do so, I want to first consider his more general account of this vocation and its connection to practical reason and autonomy before then turning to what role it plays in the sublime.

As we shall see in what follows, Kant defines our vocation in practical terms as the vocation we as human beings have to bring about, through freedom, the final end that practical reason and the moral law set for us. In order to tease out his view, let's begin by considering the connection Kant draws between our vocation and the final end of practical reason. In the first *Critique*, Kant claims that "the final end [*Endzweck*]... is nothing other than the whole vocation [*ganze Bestimmung*] of human beings and the philosophy of it is called moral philosophy" (A840/B868, transl. modified). Though this passage is short on details, it makes clear that, for Kant, our vocation is aligned with the final end, the study of which belongs to moral philosophy.

Kant discusses this issue of the final end and our vocation at more length in the third *Critique*, indeed addressing it at both the beginning and end of the text. He first raises the issue of

²⁶ Kant also discusses the sublime in Gr 4:439-42 and KpV 5:84-86.

²⁷ See, e.g., KU 5:245, 256, 264

²⁸ See, e.g., KU 5:250, 254, 255, 258, 261, 262, 269

²⁹ See, e.g., KU 5: 244, 245, 254, 255, 257, 264

³⁰ See, e.g., KU 5:257, 262, 268, 269

³¹ See, e.g., KU 5:250, 256, 264, 265, 268, 269, 273

³² Merritt (2012) also emphasizes the centrality of the sublimity of our rational vocation for Kant.

the final end in Section IX (“On the connection of the legislations of understanding and reason through the power of judgment”) of the introduction, a pivotal section for his overarching project in the third *Critique* insofar as, in it, he addresses the “great chasm” between nature and freedom (KU 5:195). There he aligns the ‘final end’ with practical reason, claiming that this is the end that practical reason sets for our “faculty of desire” (KU 5:297). He, in turn, specifies this end as the ‘effect’ that the ‘causality’ of freedom should have on nature “in accordance with its formal laws” (KU 5:195-6).³³ That is to say, on Kant’s view, the final end is an end set by practical reason and it demands that freedom causally effect nature in accordance with the moral law.

Kant returns to the issue of the final end again and at length in the “Appendix” at the end of the third *Critique* (KU 5:416-484).³⁴ Here Kant further details how freedom is to effect nature, viz., by bringing about the highest good in it. In his words,

The moral law... determines [*bestimmt*] for us, and indeed does so *a priori*, a final end, to strive after which it makes obligatory for us, and this is the **highest good in the world** possible through freedom (KU 5:450).³⁵

There are two things to note about this passage. First, Kant indicates that it is not just practical reason in general, but more specifically the moral law of practical reason that sets the final end of pursuing the highest good for us. Second, he indicates that this final end is one that we are to bring about ‘through freedom’. As he makes clear throughout the Appendix, the kind of freedom that he has in mind here is autonomy. We see this, for example, in the following description he offers of the human being:

The being of this sort is the human being, though considered as a noumenon: the only natural being in which we can nevertheless cognize [*erkennen*], on the basis of its constitution, a supersensible faculty (**freedom**) and even the law of the causality together with the object that it can set for itself as the highest end (the highest good in the world (KU 5:435)).³⁶

³³ Kant notes that insofar as freedom is supersensible, when he uses the word ‘cause’ in this context he has in mind the way in which freedom is “the **ground** for determining the causality of nature things” (KU 5:195).

³⁴ Although I cannot address this issue here, Kant offers a two-fold analysis of the final end in the Appendix, arguing, on the one hand, that our final end is pursuing the highest good, and, on the other hand, that insofar as we are beings who are capable of this, we serve as the final end of nature. The latter claim is, in turn, a key move in Kant’s moral proof of God’s existence in the context of teleology (see, e.g., KU §87).

³⁵ Kant also identifies the highest good as the final end in KpV 5:129.

³⁶ In a similar vein, Kant claims that the value of the human being “is the value that he alone can give to himself, and which consists in what he does, in how and in accordance with which principles he acts, not as a link in nature but in the **freedom** of his faculty of desire, i.e., a good will,” where the good will is something he glosses elsewhere, e.g., Gr. XXX, as a will acting autonomously out of respect for the moral law (KU 5:443). He also claims that our value stems from our status as “**the human being... under [unter] moral laws,**” where this means not acting merely ‘in accordance’ [*nach*] with moral laws (i.e., in accordance with duty), but acting under moral laws (i.e., ‘from duty’) in the sense that we legislate them to ourselves autonomously (KU 5:448 and 448n). And he describes the human being under moral laws as a human being who has “a reason, which in the relation to ends can be the supreme law for itself,” where, again, being the supreme law unto itself is what autonomy amounts to (KU 5:45).

In this context, then, what it means for the human being to act through freedom is for her to act on the basis of her supersensible freedom, qua the autonomous capacity to legislate the moral law and its corresponding final end of pursuing the highest good to herself.

Kant then connects the highest good to happiness, arguing that happiness is “the highest physical good that is possible in the world and which can be promoted, as far as it is up to us” as human beings (KU 5:240). Accordingly, he glosses the highest good in the world as happiness in proportion to moral “worthiness to be happy” (KU 5:240).³⁷ Thus, according to Kant’s analysis of it here, the final end of practical reason is one that the moral law sets and that involves the demand to bring about, through autonomy, happiness in proportion to worthiness to be happy. And it is the highest good in this sense that is the ‘effect’ that Kant has in mind in the Introduction as the final end that freedom should bring about in nature.

With this picture of the final end in place, we can now turn to the question of how this bears on our vocation. Kant’s basic idea is that the final end serves as our vocation insofar as it is an end that reason ‘imposes’ on us as human beings and demands that we strive for (KU 5:471n). The notion of a vocation, a *Bestimmung*, indeed, suggests this insofar as it is the result of us being determined [*bestimmt*] by something, and, on his view, the relevant determination comes from practical reason.³⁸ As we saw him make this point above, the final end is one that the moral law ‘determines’ for us. Continuing in this vein, Kant claims, that “[w]e are determined [*bestimmt*] *a priori* by reason to promote [the highest good] with all our powers” (KU 5:453). In a similar spirit in the second *Critique*, Kant claims that our vocation is set by our freedom qua the “capacity of being subject to special laws—namely pure practical laws given by his own reason,” and that we, as creatures who are at once sensible and rational, accordingly experience this vocation as something we must ‘respect’ and strive to live up to (KpV 5:87).³⁹ For Kant, then, the final end of pursuing the highest good through autonomy serves as our vocation insofar as it is something we feel determined to pursue in virtue of our by practical reason.

It is within this broader framework that I now wish to situate Kant’s analysis of our vocation in the *Analytic of the Sublime*, and what I hope to show is that Kant’s considered position is that this vocation is what is ‘properly sublime’. That Kant thinks the feeling of the sublimity of our

³⁷ As Kant makes this point in the second *Critique*, the highest good involves “happiness distributed in exact proportion to morality (as the worth of a person and his worthiness to be happy)” (KpV 5:110).

³⁸ See also KpV 5: 86-8 for a discussion of the connection between our vocation and practical reason.

³⁹ Although we cannot address this issue here, in this context, Kant claims that our vocation is something that we must regard with ‘reverence’ and ‘respect’ (KpV 5:86).

vocation plays a central role in judgments of the sublime is indicated by his remarks to this effect in §39,

The pleasure in the sublime in nature... lays claim to universal participation, yet already presupposes another feeling, namely that of its supersensible vocation, which no matter how obscure it might be, has a moral foundation [*Grundlage*] (KU 5:292).

Kant makes these remarks in the context of summarizing the different kinds of aesthetic judgments in general and, as he makes clear here, the pleasure that we feel in the sublime presupposes a feeling of the sublimity of our morally grounded supersensible vocation.

This, however, is not the first time Kant suggests that the pleasure we feel in the sublime depends on our feeling for our moral vocation; rather it is a claim that he makes in each major section of the *Analytic*. In the mathematically sublime, for example, he claims that, “the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation” (KU 5:257). Meanwhile, in the dynamically sublime, he says, “the mind can make palpable to itself the sublimity of its own vocation even over nature” (KU 5:262). And in the General Remark, he maintains that we “place what is absolutely great [i.e., sublime] only in its (the subject’s) own vocation” (KU 5:269).⁴⁰ His summary remarks in §39 thus appear to be picking up on a theme that he has traced throughout the *Analytic*, viz., that in judgments of the sublime our pleasure depends, at least in part, on a feeling of the sublimity of our practical vocation. What is more, this view would seem to fit with his overarching aims in the third *Critique* as detailed in the Introduction, viz., explaining how the great chasm between nature and freedom can be overcome and how the final end of the latter can be realized in the former. Thus by emphasizing the sublimity of our vocation, Kant would seem to be positioning his analysis of judgments of the sublime to make a contribution to his overall goal in the third *Critique*.⁴¹

As I mentioned earlier, however, my reading of the sublime is thus at odds with two influential ways of interpreting Kant’s view, which we shall consider in turn. In the first vein, commentators have argued that it is only the dynamically sublime that has a practical orientation, while the mathematically sublime has a more theoretical or aesthetic orientation.⁴² After all, Kant

⁴⁰ In the mathematically sublime, Kant defines sublimity as what is “**absolutely great**” (KU 5:248).

⁴¹ I return to this issue in §6.

⁴² A number of commentators who defend the positive interpretation distinguish between the imagination’s theoretical or aesthetic orientation in the mathematically sublime and its moral orientation in the dynamically sublime. Gibbons (1994), for example, maintains that although in both judgments the imagination presents an idea of reason, in the mathematically sublime it is the theoretical idea of infinity, which is presented by means of a felt grasp of the non-conceptual order of pure intuition (142-3), whereas in the dynamically sublime, the imagination presents the moral idea of the power of practical reason (148). In a somewhat similar vein, Pillow (2000) argues that whereas in the dynamically sublime, the imagination is oriented towards moral ideas, in the mathematically sublime it is oriented towards reason’s more general demand for totality and produces aesthetic unities in accordance with this demand (71-3, 107). Focusing

distinguishes between the mathematically and dynamically sublime by claiming that the former is related to theoretical reason (“the **faculty of cognition**”), while the latter is related to practical reason (“the **faculty of desire**”) (KU 5: 247). This, in turn, seems to shape his conception of the vocation at issue in each instance for in the mathematically sublime he claims that what is involved in the mathematically sublime is the “rational vocation of our cognitive faculty” (KU 5:257). By contrast in the dynamically sublime, Kant connects our vocation to the superiority of practical reason:

nature is judged as sublime... because it calls forth our power... to regard those things about which we are concerned (goods, health and life) as trivial, and hence to regard its power... as not the sort of dominion over ourselves and our authority to which we would have to bow if it came down to our highest principles and their affirmation or abandonment (KU 5:262).

For these reasons, it can be tempting to think that there are different vocations involved in the mathematically and dynamically sublime: whereas in the former case, our vocation has a theoretical orientation, in the latter case it has a practical one.

Nevertheless, by my lights, if we take a closer look at Kant’s analysis of the sublime in general and his account of the mathematically sublime in particular, then we will find that he ultimately treats the vocation involved in both the mathematically and dynamically sublime in practical terms. Beginning with his analysis of the sublime in general, what I want to highlight is the fact that in both §29 and the General Remark, Kant claims that judgments of both kinds of sublime have an overarching moral orientation. In §29, for example, Kant addresses the modality of judgments of the sublime and he argues that the necessity of these judgments is grounded in “the predisposition to the feeling for (practical) ideas, i.e., to that which is moral” (KU 5:265). In explaining why this is the case, Kant claims that the negative pleasure we experience in the sublime is made possible by,

a dominion that reason exercises over sensibility... in order to enlarge it in a way suitable for its own proper domain (the practical) and to allow it to look out upon the infinite, which for sensibility is an abyss (KU 5:265).

more on the notion of freedom, Brady (2013a) argues that like Addison, Kant thinks that the mathematically sublime involves an experience of the aesthetic freedom of the imagination, i.e., a freedom that pertains to the imagination itself independent from our capacity for reason, and that it is only in the dynamically sublime that the imagination fosters our awareness of our negative practical freedom (173, 180-1). Meanwhile Guyer (2005): 227-8 maintains that the imagination contributes to our realization of pure theoretical reason in the mathematically sublime and of freedom in a negative sense in the dynamically sublime. So too does Clewis (2009) claim that for Kant although the imagination contributes to the revelation of freedom in both cases, in the mathematically sublime, it reveals transcendental freedom, i.e., a general faculty of spontaneity, whereas in the dynamically sublime it reveals negative practical freedom (7, 17, 66-7). Offering more morally neutral readings, Budd (2002): 85 argues that the sublime reveals our insignificance and Deligiorgi (2014) argues that the sublime reveals truths about us as agents who are capable of setting ends.

Notice that in this passage, Kant alludes to themes from both the dynamical sublime, viz., the idea that reason exercises ‘dominion’ over sensibility, and from the mathematical sublime, viz., the idea that reason allows us to ‘look out upon the infinite’, which suggests that his comments here can be read more generally. So understood, this passage implies that the feeling of elevation or enlargement in the sublime in general is something that has a moral foundation.

Kant, again, emphasize the moral orientation of the sublime in general in the General Remark, where he argues that what judgments of the sublime in general do is “make the lawfulness of action out of duty representable... as sublime” (KU 5:267). He then glosses the lawfulness of action out of duty as involving “**the determinability** [*Bestimmbarkeit*] **of the subject**” by means of the idea of “an **absolutely necessitating** law,” where the subject is one that “can sense in itself **obstacles** in sensibility but at the same time superiority over them through overcoming them” (KU 5:267). On Kant’s view, then, it is the determinability of the subject by the moral law that judgments of the sublime in general are to make representable.

Taking §29 and the General Remark together, then, we have reason to think that, for Kant, both the mathematically and dynamically sublime will ultimately have a practical orientation. I take this to be relevant to our analysis of the vocation at issue in the sublime because if read in this light, then Kant’s claim in §39 that the supersensible vocation involved in the sublime has a moral foundation seems to be a specific application of the more general thesis that judgments of the sublime have a moral foundation. Although, as noted above, it is relatively clear that in the case of the dynamically sublime, Kant does, indeed, claim that the vocation involved has this sort of moral foundation, what I now hope to show is that a careful examination of his analysis of the vocation involved in the mathematically sublime supports this reading as well.

In his discussion of the mathematically sublime in §27, Kant describes the vocation at issue in the following terms,

it is a law (of reason) for us and part of our vocation to estimate everything great that nature contains as an object of the senses as small in comparison with ideas of reason; and whatever arouses the feeling of this supersensible vocation in us is in agreement with the law (KU 5:257).

For Kant, then, the vocation at issue in this context is a ‘supersensible’ one that involves estimating as small everything in comparison with the greatness of the ideas of reason. He then continues by claiming that what judgments of the mathematically sublime do is “arouse the feeling of our supersensible vocation in us” (KU 5:258). Given that in §39 Kant explicitly states that the

supersensible vocation at issue in the sublime has a ‘moral foundation’, then this suggests that the vocation at issue in the mathematically sublime is ultimately our moral one (KU 5: 258).

Further support for this reading comes from the fact that Kant claims that the mathematically sublime is “purposive **for the whole vocation** of the mind” (KU 5:259). As we saw in the passage from the first *Critique* above, Kant is clear that the ‘whole vocation’ of the human being is the practical one that is the subject matter of moral philosophy.⁴³ Moreover, this practical account of our whole vocation is the one we would expect him to defend given his commitment the primacy of practical reason. So the fact that Kant indicates that it is the whole vocation of the mind that is at issue in the mathematically sublime gives us further reason to think the vocation at issue is our practical one.

What is more, this practical reading is consistent with Kant’s emphasis on the practical orientation of the mathematically sublime in §26. There he claims that the mathematically sublime brings about “an enlargement of the mind which feels itself empowered to overstep the limits of sensibility from another (practical) point of view” and that it “produce[s] a disposition of the mind which is in conformity with [ideas of reason] and compatible with that which the influence of determinate (practical) ideas on feeling would produce” (KU 5:255, 256). What these two passages indicate is that, on Kant’s view, the mathematically sublime ultimately involves feelings that are connected to our practical capacities. However, this is just what we would anticipate he would say given that the vocation that we feel in the mathematically sublime is a practical one. Thus, in addition to his general claims in §39 that the vocation at issue in the sublime has a moral foundation and in §29 and the General Remark that the sublime has an overarching moral orientation, his discussion of our vocation in the mathematically sublime itself suggests that it, like the vocation at issue in the dynamically sublime, is our moral vocation.

While I take these considerations to give us reason to treat the vocation at issue in both the mathematically and dynamically sublime along practical lines, my view also contrasts with a second set of commentators insofar as I read Kant as connecting this vocation not just to freedom in the negative sense, but in the positive sense of autonomy as well.⁴⁴ Recall that, on Kant’s view, our

⁴³ Kant also mentions the ‘whole vocation’ of the human mind in the first *Critique* in the Preface, where he claims that the human being is “never... capable of being satisfied by what is temporal (since the temporal is always insufficient for the predispositions of our whole vocation” (Bxxxii).

⁴⁴ On this point, I am in disagreement with Guyer (2005), Clewis (2009): 17, 66-7, and Brady (2013b): 180-1 who maintain that the sublime does not reveal positive freedom to us and in agreement with Doran (2015): 246 who argues that it can reveal autonomy to us, though in disagreement with Doran, I claim that this can happen in both the mathematically and dynamically sublime.

vocation is something that involves bringing about the final end of the highest good through the autonomous exercise of reason. Now, insofar as judgments of the sublime give us a feeling for this vocation, they should at the same time give us a feeling for our autonomy. And this is, indeed, what Kant suggests in the General Remark. As we just saw, for example, he claims that judgments of the sublime make representable, the “**determinability of the subject**” by means of the “**absolutely necessitating**” moral law, which she legislates to herself (KU 5:267). Moreover, later in the General Remark, Kant says that in the sublime,

the moral law... makes itself aesthetically knowable [*ästhetisch-kennlich*] only through sacrifices (which is a deprivation, although in behalf of inner freedom, but also reveals in us an unfathomable depth of this supersensible faculty together with its consequences reaching beyond what can be seen) (KU 5:271).

As this passage indicates, even though in the sublime we feel sensibly deprived, this at the same time makes the moral law aesthetically knowable because we realize that this deprivation is the result of the moral law impinging upon our sensible side. Insofar as the moral law is something we are, in turn, aware of as something we autonomously legislate to ourselves, being aesthetically aware of the moral law in the sublime brings with it an awareness of our autonomy. Kant’s trajectory in the General Remark thus suggests that our feeling for our vocation in the sublime involves a feeling not just for our negative freedom, but also for our autonomy.

In the end, on my reading, we should take seriously Kant’s summary statement of his view of the sublime in §39 to the effect that our feeling of pleasure in the sublime involves a feeling of our morally grounded supersensible vocation as indicative of his view that our vocation is what is properly sublime. I take this not only to make sense of the more general emphasis he places on the moral orientation of the sublime, but also on his practical analysis of the vocation involved in both the mathematically and dynamically sublime. And insofar as the feeling for this vocation involves a feeling for our autonomy, I read Kant’s considered position to be that what is ‘properly sublime’ is our practical vocation to autonomously bring about the final end set for us by practical reason. As such, regardless of whether we consider how this vocation manifests in a theoretical context, i.e., through us judging everything great in nature as small in comparison with reason, or in a practical context, i.e., through us judging everything mighty in nature as powerless in the face of reason, what is presented as properly sublime is our vocation to autonomously pursue the final end set for us by our practical reason and the moral law.

4.2 Symbols of Sublimity

Having established our practical vocation as what is properly sublime, we can now ask what kind of presentation, schematic or symbolic, the imagination uses in order to present it. Although Kant never uses the word ‘symbol’ to designate these presentations, I hope to show that we have reason to treat these presentations as symbols instead of schemata because they meet the two conditions, the indirectness and reflection conditions, that Kant places on symbols.

As we saw above, the indirectness condition reflects the fact that unlike schemata, symbols do not literally or straightforwardly map onto the concepts that they symbolize. Recall also that when it comes to ideas of reason, the only possible presentation of them is symbolic, not schematic, because no intuition could literally map onto them. Now given that the concept presented in the sublime is the concept of our ‘supersensible’ vocation, we have reason to think that any presentation of it would have to be an indirect one (KU 5:257, 258, 268). What is more, in the “Appendix,” Kant describes the final end involved in our vocation as an ‘idea’ of practical reason (KU 5:453-4). To the extent that the presentation of our vocation thus involves a presentation of this idea, then it seems to demand a symbolic, rather than a schematic presentation on this count as well. What these considerations thus suggest is that, for Kant, since the sensible content of our intuitive representations of a very large or powerful object in nature cannot literally or straightforwardly map onto the supersensible content of our conceptual representation of our vocation, then the former can only present the latter in an indirect way.

This, indeed, is a theme that Kant develops in the *Analytic of the Sublime*, although he tends to cash it out in negative terms, insisting that the imagination cannot schematically present supersensible ideas. For example, in §29 Kant claims that our feeling of being both repelled and attracted to objects in judgments of the sublime stems from “the inadequacy of nature to [ideas]... and of the effort of the imagination to treat nature as a schema for them” (KU 5:265). This passage implies that something goes wrong if we try and treat our representations of nature as a schema for ideas, a problem that results from the fact that the former, as sensible representations, cannot directly correspond to the latter, as supersensible representations.

Kant makes a similar point in the *General Remark*, where he says that, “Taken literally, and considered logically, ideas cannot be presented” (KU 5:268). While this might seem to suggest that Kant does not think supersensible ideas can be presented at all, it is significant that he qualifies this by claiming that they cannot be presented ‘literally’ or ‘logically’ and then proceeds at the end of the paragraph to say that we can nevertheless “**think** of nature in its totality, as the presentation of something supersensible, subjectively” (KU 5:268). Thus although Kant rules out the possibility that

supersensible ideas can be presented logically, i.e., schematically, he nevertheless makes room for another ‘subjective’ way for nature to present the supersensible, which certainly suggests that a symbolic relation obtains here. What this line of thought indicates, then, is that the imagination cannot present our supersensible vocation with its idea of the final end in a direct way, but must rely on an indirect presentation instead; hence the presentations in the sublime meet the indirectness condition.

Let’s turn now to the reflection condition, which requires that the pattern of reflection that the intuitive representation calls for is similar to the pattern of reflection called for by the concept. That the imagination’s presentations in the sublime meet this condition follows from the fact that these presentations elicit a form of reflection that is similar to the one that is involved in our reflection on our practical vocation. As Kant tends to make this point, the imagination’s exercise in the sublime is something that brings about a disposition or feeling in us that is similar to the moral disposition or the moral feeling.

More specifically, Kant claims that both the feeling in the sublime and the moral feeling are instances of the more general feeling of respect, which he defines as, “The feeling of the inadequacy of our capacity for the attainment of an idea **that is a law for us**” (KU 5:257). So understood, the feeling of respect in general involves two moments: there is a negative moment in which we recognize our inadequacies as sensible creatures and a positive moment in which we recognize that reason within elevates us above sensibility. This twofold structure is one that he takes to manifest in both species of respect, viz., the moral feeling and the feeling of the sublime. In the former case, Kant claims that we, on the one hand, undergo a feeling of ‘humiliation’, as our tendency as sensible beings to act on inclinations, i.e., our self-conceit, is struck down by the moral law, and, on the other hand, a feeling of ‘elevation’, as we become conscious that it is the moral law within that is authoritative for us and that gives us our higher vocation (see, e.g., KpV 5:78-79). And as we have seen, this same twofold structure is also central to the negative pleasure we experience in the sublime as we both feel displeasure when we recognize our limits and inadequacies as sensible creatures and feel pleasure when we recognize that our practical vocation elevates us above everything sensible. This being said, these two species of respect differ insofar as moral respect determines the will in a way that respect in the sublime, as part of a disinterested aesthetic judgment, does not.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Insofar as I take the feeling of respect we have in the sublime to be similar to, but not identical with the feeling of respect we have in morality, I am in agreement with Matthews (1996): 176, Allison (2001): 326-7, Clewis (2009): Ch. 3, Merritt (2012): 43-48; Brady (2013a): Ch. 3; and Doran (2015): 249-252 who insist on an aesthetic reading of respect in

This difference notwithstanding, the symmetry in the disposition we have in the sublime and the moral feeling is something Kant connects to the exercise of the imagination:

in judging a thing to be sublime the [imagination] is related to **reason**, in order to correspond subjectively with its **ideas**... in order to produce a disposition of the mind which is in conformity with them and compatible with that which the influence of determinate (practical) ideas on feeling would produce (KU 5:256).

Elaborating on this point in the General Remark, Kant says,

The idea of the supersensible... is awakened in us by means of the object of the aesthetic judging which stretches the imagination to its limits... in that it is grounded in the feeling of a vocation of the mind that entirely oversteps the domain of the former (the moral feeling)... In fact a feeling for the sublime in nature cannot even be conceived without connecting it to a disposition of the mind that is similar to the moral disposition (KU 5:268).

Given that in these passage Kant indicates that the imagination's exercise awakens in us a disposition that is similar to the moral disposition, then we have reason to think that the presentations it produces in this process meet the reflection condition, as the way we reflect on very large or powerful objects in nature is similar to the pattern of reflection called for by our vocation.

Since the imagination's presentations in the sublime meet both the indirectness and reflection conditions, then we have reason to think of them as symbolic presentations of our practical vocation. So understood, in the mathematical case, we can think of our intuitive representations of very large objects in nature as a symbolic presentation of the greatness of our vocation as something that reveals the smallness of all ends that we might have as a result of our relation to nature in comparison with the greatness of the final end determined by practical reason to pursue the highest good in the world. Meanwhile, in the dynamical case, we can conceive of our intuitive representation of a very powerful object as a symbolic presentation of the might of our vocation, as something that sets as an end for us something that cannot be threatened by even the most powerful object in nature, viz., the end of happiness no longer as something physically dependent, but rather happiness in proportion to worthiness to be happy.

§5. The Imagination and Pleasure in the Sublime

With this analysis of the symbolic exercise of the imagination in the sublime in place, we are finally in a position to address the issue of whether the imagination contributes to the pleasure we experience in the sublime. As we saw before, Kant connects the feeling of displeasure we have in

the sublime and in disagreement with Crawford (1974): 145-59; Crowther (1989): 99, 134-5, 165-6; and Schaper (1992): 382-4 who offer a moral reading of respect in the sublime.

the sublime to *contrapurposiveness*, more specifically to the feeling that very large or powerful objects appear contrapurposive with respect to the imagination's efforts at presentation either in aesthetic estimation or in the projection of our happiness. However, on my reading, Kant also thinks that the imagination can contribute to the pleasure we feel, insofar as the presentations it produces are *purposive* with respect our vocation.

For Kant, the issue of purposiveness in the sublime requires some care because, as we saw earlier, unlike in the beautiful where the form of the object is judged to be purposive, in the sublime this is not the case. Hence, Kant asks,

Since everything that is to please the merely reflecting power of judgment without interest must involve in its representation subjective and as such universally valid purposiveness, though here no purposiveness of the **form** of the object... is the basis for the judging, the question arises what is this subjective purposiveness [in the sublime] (KU 5:254)?

In the General Remark, Kant makes it clear that the subjective purposiveness we experience in the sublime is connected to the awakening of our awareness of reason as a supersensible capacity and of our supersensible vocation (see, KU 5:268), so the question for us is what if anything in the imagination's contribution to the sublime is purposive to this end.

There are admittedly two different ways in which Kant describes the imagination's link to this purposiveness. At times, he argues that the imagination's *failures* are purposive: when the imagination proves itself to be inadequate, this awakens our awareness of reason and our vocation. As he makes this point in the mathematically sublime,

imagination and **reason** produce subjective purposiveness through their conflict: namely, a feeling that we have pure self-sufficient reason... whose preeminence cannot be made intuitiable through anything except the inadequacy [of the imagination] (KU 5:258).

However, at other points, Kant indicates that it is the imagination's *accomplishments* that are purposive, i.e., that the presentations it produces bring about this awareness. Indeed, this is what he says at the end of his introduction to the sublime in §23:

[the sublime] indicates nothing purposive in nature itself, but only in the possible **use** of its intuitions to *make palpable* [*fühlbar*] in ourselves a purposiveness that is entirely independent of nature... [In the sublime] no particular form is represented in [nature], but only a purposive use of that *the imagination makes* of its representation is developed (KU 5:246, my emph.).

Kant makes a similar point in the dynamically sublime, in a passage we discussed earlier,

nature is here called sublime merely because it raises the imagination to the point of presenting those cases in which the mind can *make palpable* to itself the sublimity of its own vocation even over nature (KU 5:262, my emph.).

Elsewhere Kant describes this as the “supersensible use” of the imagination’s representations and he thinks they are purposive because they make palpable our higher purposiveness, i.e., the one that is connected to our vocation (KU 5:267). In the end, I think that there is room in Kant’s account to maintain both lines of thought: while the imagination’s failures in part make us aware of the superiority of reason over sensibility, its symbolic presentations are also purposive for us insofar as they make our supersensible vocation more palpable.

I believe that these considerations about the purposiveness of the imagination’s presentations in the sublime help us make sense of why Kant claims that in judgments of the sublime the imagination is enlarged and empowered. Although Kant is clear extremely large objects are contrapurposive with respect to the imagination’s cognitive efforts at aesthetic estimation and extremely powerful objective are contrapurposive with respect to the imagination’s practical projection of our happiness as a state that is physically dependent, he also claims that in judgment of the sublime the imagination finds a higher calling, viz., as an instrument of reason. Making this point in his discussion of the mathematically sublime, Kant says that, when reason demands that the imagination represent the idea of an absolute whole, “our imagination... demonstrates its limits and inadequacies, but at the same time its vocation for adequately realizing that idea [of reason] as a law” (KU 5:257). So too in the dynamically sublime, Kant claims,

For the imagination, in accordance with the law of association, makes our state of contentment physically dependent; but the very same imagination, in accordance with principles of schematism of the power of judgment (consequently to the extent that it is subordinated to freedom), is an instrument of reason and its ideas, but as such a power to assert our independence in the face of the influence of nature, to diminish the value of what is great according to these, and so to place what is absolutely great only in its (the subject’s) own vocation (KU 5:269).⁴⁶

As in the mathematically sublime, in this passage we find Kant acknowledging the two-fold role the imagination plays in the dynamically sublime: although our imagination can fall under the sway of the law of association and make our state of contentment physically dependent, it can also be subordinated to reason and serve as an instrument of freedom. In both the mathematically and dynamically sublime, then, Kant acknowledges that the imagination can act in a purposive way,

⁴⁶ In emphasizing the imagination’s freedom from acting in accordance with the law of association, Kant is distancing his view from other accounts of the sublime, e.g., Addison’s, Gerard’s, and Alison’s, according to which the imagination engages in association. See Brady (2013): Ch. 1 for a discussion of the role association plays in these alternative accounts.

serving as an instrument of reason, by producing symbolic presentations that make our practical vocation palpable to us.

However, once we appreciate that the imagination operates not just in an inadequate way, but also in an expanded and purposive way in the sublime, then we have reason to think that it, alongside reason can contribute to the pleasure we feel in the sublime. For just as our pleasure in the beautiful is connected to our consciousness of the purposiveness of the object for our free play, so too in the sublime, our pleasure should be connected to the consciousness of the purposiveness of the imagination's symbolic presentations of sublimity. This being the case, although the pleasure we feel in the sublime results, in part, from our awareness of how reason elevates us above sensible limitations, the imagination also contributes to it, insofar as it acts purposively by producing symbols that make our vocation palpable to us.

§6. Nature, Freedom, and Symbols of Sublimity

So far I hope to have shown that even though in judgments of the sublime the imagination plays a negative role, giving rise to a feeling of displeasure, this is not the whole story. Kant also attributes to the imagination a positive role: it is enlarged and empowered in the sublime when it treats the representations of large or powerful objects in nature as symbols of the greatness and might of our practical vocation, something that, in turn, contributes to the pleasure that we feel in these judgments.

By way of conclusion, I want to suggest that the pleasure the imagination gives rise to in the sublime contributes to Kant's overall project in the third *Critique* in a unique way. As mentioned earlier, in the third *Critique*, Kant's primary goal is to explain how the great chasm between nature and freedom can be overcome. While his analysis of how this takes place through the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful has garnered a great deal of attention, less attention has been paid to how this takes place in the case of the sublime. Lesser still is the attention that has been paid to how the imagination's exercise in the sublime contributes to this.⁴⁷ However, I think a sharper look reveals that there is a distinctive way in which the symbolic exercise of the imagination in the sublime bridges this gap.

⁴⁷ This is perhaps encouraged by Kant's declaration that the Analytic of the Sublime is "a mere appendix to the aesthetic judging of the purposiveness of nature" (KU 5:246). Nevertheless some commentators, including Gibbons (1994): Ch. 4; Clewis (2009); (2015); and Loose (2011) have argued that the sublime contributes to bridging this gap in significant ways.

That symbols play a pivotal role in Kant's account of how the beautiful bridges the gap between nature and freedom is evident in §59; indeed, this is the last substantive section of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment" and thus serves in many ways as his conclusion.⁴⁸ As we saw above, in this section, Kant argues that beauty is a symbol of morality because the way we reflect on beautiful objects in nature is similar to how we reflect in morality. He claims that this symbolic treatment of the beautiful, in turn, contributes to the 'transition' between nature and freedom as the symmetry in our reflective patterns in the beautiful and morality contributes to our sense of fit between us as moral agents and the natural world. The imagination's symbols thus play a crucial mediating role in Kant's overall account of how the beautiful bridges the gap between nature and freedom.

Although in §59 Kant focuses on the beautiful, given our analysis of the imagination's symbolic contribution to judgments of the sublime, we have reason to suspect that here too the imagination can help us see nature as purposive with respect to our freedom and morality. For when the imagination treats an object in nature as a symbolic presentation of our vocation, it offers us a way to see something *in nature* as, at the same time, a presentation of our vocation that belongs to the realm of *freedom*. Indeed, we come to treat something in nature as a symbolic presentation of our calling to bring about, through freedom, the final end of practical reason, viz., the highest good in the world. As was the case with the beautiful, then, the imagination's symbols present something in nature as conducive to our moral purposes. What is especially striking about these cases, however, is that in them the imagination allows us to treat even the largest and most powerful objects in nature that would normally overwhelm us, as conducive to the presentation of final end as autonomous agents. Far from the imagination, then, playing only a negative role in judgments of the sublime, by attending to its symbols of sublimity, we find that it not only makes a positive contribution to the sublime, but also that it has a decisive role to play in bridging the great chasm, allowing us to see even the most extreme in nature as fitted to freedom.⁴⁹

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⁴⁸ The only remaining section of the "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment" is §60, which Kant labels an 'Appendix' on the methodology of taste.

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