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The Environmental Sublime: From Aesthetics to Ethics

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ABSTRACT. This paper is about the concept of the sublime and its environmental ethical implications. I claim that sublime, as an aesthetic concept; is helpful to give us moral motivation for preservation of nature. We have a paradoxical relation with nature; we are both a part of, and alien to it. Hence, I claim the sublime is a specific aesthetic concept that can help us unveil this paradoxical relation due to its peculiar dual character causing both pleasure and displeasure. It can give insight how to adopt, adjust and accommodate to the environmental problems. First, with its displeasure effect, it can point to the “Otherness,” of Nature and induce (1) humility and (2) respect and second, with its pleasurable effect, it can reveal our “Oneness,” with nature and create (1) attentiveness/sensitivity and (2) compassion/love for Nature. The objections against the sublime fall into three different categories, (1) historical, it is an outdated concept that has no relevance in the contemporary agenda, (2) metaphysical, the sublime is same with religious experience, and (3) ethical, the sublime is self-regarding, anthropocentric and creates distance with nature. Against these I defend that, (1) nature is the original sublime and it can never be exhausted, (2) ideas and feelings can have associations, but this does not undermine the fact that the sublime is aesthetic and secular, with no necessary dependence on a divine being and (3) the sublime does not create distance, but accepts the difference and commonality with Nature, and is not *anthropocentric*-centered on humans, but *anthropogeneric* -generated by humans.

I. What is the Sublime?

It was the philosopher Longinus in the first century A.D. who described sublime as the indeterminate part of the rhetorical speeches of men which lacked any form in his work *Peri Hupsous*. *Hupsous* literally means “height” or as *megathos* is used as an equivalent, it means “greatness” in Ancient

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Greek (Heath, 2012, 12f). The Latin term for the sublime has similar connotations. The etymology of the word composes of a prefix and a noun: *sub-limis*. *Sub* is a preposition of place that means “under, below” or “at the bottom”. *Super* or *surpa* are the other two close words that respectively mean “a movement from below to above” or “to rise” (Cohn, 1977, 291). On the other hand, for *limen* there are two various meanings: (1) threshold or (2) limit, boundary. In this sense, when the two terms are connected, they literally mean “below the threshold” or “to rise from below to above”.

Longinus’ writings were revived back in the literature with Boileau’s translation in 1600s. Afterwards, a new genre of sublime aesthetics flourished among the English philosophers such as Addison, Hutcheson and Burke. However, the discussion reached its most sophisticated form in Kant in 1780s with his 3rd Critique. Kant distinguished sublime in two kinds of aesthetic judgment: mathematical and dynamical. Mathematical sublime is related with greatness in size, measure and dynamical is related with power. Infinity is the concept linked with mathematical sublime. Although the mind tries to apprehend the vastness of the object lying beyond, it is impossible to comprehend it in its totality. Mathematical sublime is an experience that is absolutely great, “beyond all comparison”. On the other hand, dynamical sublime is about the power of the natural object. When one encounters a volcano in explosion, a tsunami that is in devastation or mountains that are reaching as if “to the heavens”, one encounters a dynamical sublime. In mathematical sublime a proper distance is important with respect to the encountered object, neither too small nor too far away, which would affect the comprehension of the mind; and similarly in the dynamical sublime, the subject has to be in a proper distance where his existence would neither be threatened nor lack the ability to perceive the power of the object.

In both types of sublime, Kant involves (1) an estimation of nature’s “formlessness”, (2) an operation of the imagination, which creates a “serious activity” with reason, (3) a realization of the power of reason, positing the source of the sublime in one’s own mind and (4) a felt inadequacy of our power hand in hand with a compensating superiority, “negative pleasure”. Our focus will be on the fourth characteristics, i.e. the dual characteristic of sublime, experience of both displeasure and pleasure. Mingled with “these positive and negative elements”, sublime becomes “not just an

emotion with two aspects but as one in which there is a movement back and forth between two aspects, an oscillation between repulsion from and attraction to the object” (Budd, 2003, 135).

2. The Paradoxical Dual Character

The importance of sublime lies in its “peculiar dual character”. Many scholars even from the times of Longinus have described it as “oxymoronic” (Hitt, 1999, 607). Addison (1773) defines it as “agreeable horror” (261), Burke (1998) “a delightful horror” and Kant “negative pleasure” that composes of “at once a feeling of displeasure and a simultaneously awakened pleasure” (KU, 5: 106). The first stage is displeasure where the feelings of terror (Burke, 1998, 53), astonishment or distress (Burke, 1998, 79) is felt. It is the moment where the subject feels his “creaturehood” (Otto, 1928, 35), extreme smallness and insignificance. On the other hand, the second stage is quite contrary to the first one, a feeling of pleasure. Pleasure induces us not to abstain from the experience; but be engrossed in the phenomena and feel “*ekstasis*” (Longinus, 1.2., 33.4, 39.2) or a kind of “oceanic feeling” (Young, 2005, 140). The combination of these two phases makes sublime to be *schlechtin gross*¹, “awefully big” or *schlechtweg*, “simply absolute” (Kant, KU, 5: 249) and illuminates the paradoxical character of our relation with nature.

2.1. Displeasure

The first phase is the negative side of the medallion which is marked with displeasure. The emotions heralding in this stage is first of all “terror” which is a “natural emotion of fear”, distress or astonishment as Burke cites. For Kant, it is not “fear” *per se* but a peculiar “displeasure” that leads to disturbance with an admixture of uneasiness. The subject goes through a “painful” state with “bold, overhanging, as it were threatening cliffs, thunder clouds towering up into the heavens...the boundless ocean set into a rage” or with “a lofty waterfall on a might river” (Kant, KU, 5:262). In these

¹ *Schlect* in German means “bad” or “aweful”, here in English it can come to mean as “aweful” which also has the root word of “awe”. It is interesting to see the link between “awe” and “aweful”.

instances our capacities are without comparison powerless; we realize our “own fragility in the face of the forces of nature” (Young, 2005, 133). Otto (1928) explains the same phase as a “*mysterium tremendum*”. *Mysterium* as a concept that means “hidden or esoteric”, in other words “extraordinary” or unfamiliar (27). It denotes the dissimilar nature of the experienced object to one’s own being. *Mysterium tremendum* denotes “absolute inapproachability” (Otto, 1928, 34), a mystical awe, a kind of “shudder” (Otto, 1928, 32). Mark that it is not merely a fear; if it was so, then experiencer would have run away from those scenes. Burke and Kant both emphasize that there should be a proper distance between the subject and the phenomenon so that the subject acknowledges his own existence is not barely threatened but *could have been* threatened if it was *that* close.

The next question is: what causes the painful state of the sublime, leading one to shudder or be awfully struck? The answers come along with a rich terminology: “mortal condition” (Deguy, 1993, 9), finitude (Nancy, 1993, 46) and “creaturehood” or “creature-consciousness” (Otto, 1928, 35). We are creatures that are born and will be dead. In this respect, sublime reminds us our mortality, the fragile aspect of our being that is a part of “beings of nature”, small and insignificant. For Kant, this is the part we share with animal nature, dependent on time and space and will deteriorate with time and space. That is why, in sublime we fear or feel displeasure towards our “own death” (Young, 2005, 133). The body we have is a material of everydayness, an embodied and mortal individuality that is incomparably petty in contrast to nature. Otto (1928) calls this moment the realization of our “creature consciousness” (35), where the individual becomes aware of his/her dependency on the material things above and beyond us.

As the dynamical makes us aware of our “vanishing nothingness” as individuals, in the face of nature’s power, so the mathematical “reduces us to nought” in the face of its immensity; as the dynamic makes us aware of our fragility in the face of its gigantic forces of nature—and so of what we normally repress, the inevitability of death—so the math makes us aware of the nothingness of our tenure in space and time, the blink-of-an-eye-ness of our existence, the almost-hereness of death. (Young, 2005, 138)

Creaturehood means “the status of being a creature” that makes you feel

petty and small, in contrast to the “majesty” of the “Other”. It is in connection with the “feeling of dependency” which gives “immediate and primary reference to an object outside the self”. The moment one is dependent on an externality, it acknowledges the existence of “others” apart from his/her own being. In sublime’s first phase, when one realizes his/her creaturehood one becomes aware of the existence of nature independent of oneself. Nature stands with such might and Otherness right in front of us (Otto, 1928, 24). What is more, the fact of being “beyond our comprehension and apprehension” strengthens the fact that Nature is “wholly other” which transcends our limits. “Its kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb” (Otto, 1928, 42).

2.2. Pleasure

The peculiar character of sublime experience does not compose only of, i.e. displeasure, but consequently transforms into pleasure. Sublime phenomenon first raises terror, fear, and distress; but afterwards causes pleasure, fearlessness, equanimity and joy. The emotions heralding in the second phase of the sublime are fearlessness, equanimity, joy (Young, 2005, 136f), pleasure (Kant), eternity, *ekstasis* (Longinus) and oceanic feeling (Freud). Although the first phase reminds us our mortal and finite condition, brings pain and displeasure; the spectator still desires to continue his/her experience which means that s/he gets satisfaction and feels pleasure after a while. The question is what makes one to have this oceanic feeling?

There are various answers for the motive behind the pleasurable part of sublime in literature. Longinus defines the sublime experience in *Peri Hupsous* as “*ekstasis*”, a joyful element in which we sense “something superior to our natural self” (Young, 2005, 136). With feelings of *ekstasis*, we “transcend our everyday selves, undergo a kind of ‘out-of-body’ experience”. “*Ekstasis*” is an experience of “transporting” from the ordinary self (ibid.). In Greek, it literally means *ek-stasis*, stepping out (Soelle, 2001, 33). Hence, for Longinus the pleasurable element in sublime is the fact of being transported and transcended to a state that is distinct than “everydayness of embodied and mortal individuality” (ibid.). Similarly, Kant addresses the sublime experience as a sign of *noumenal* self which is akin to “God’s will” (KU, 5:263).

Kant asserts that in sublime experience, the supersensible part of human nature, “rationality”, is realized (KU, 5:261). We feel pleasure, because we realize the common core we share with the transcendent reality. This is “reason” which has the ability to shape and structure a will, and a will that is able to put his own laws upon itself. Hence, sublime is the realization of our freedom, our rationality and our *noumenal* self that we share with Gods and angels, i.e. the pure rational realm. Just like the German word of sublime literally indicates, “*erhabene*”, sublime “raises” us “up” from the “operations of nature” (KU, 5:103-4).

Similarly in Schopenhauer (1969), the pleasure felt in the second phase of sublime is explained as a means of finding our “real”, “eternal” nature. Sublime fits into his philosophy as a realization of the “eternal, serene subject of knowing” (205) that is in contrast to the petty, individual will.

He feels himself as individual the feeble phenomenon of will...a vanishing nothingness in the face of the stupendous forces; and he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing, who as the condition of every object is the supporter of this whole world... He himself is free from and foreign to, all willing and all needs, in the quiet comprehension of the Ideas. (Schopenhauer, 1969, 204-5)

In postmodern literature, similar echoes are found in the writings of Nancy, Lyotard or Deguy. They all accept the fact that sublime is a move beyond the limits. Although they do not explicitly refer to any concept that implicates “transcendence”, they accept the fact that sublime presents a realm which gives the insight of infinity. Nancy (1993) asserts that “sublime is the feeling of the infinite (149)” and “nature is...sublime in those of its phenomena the intuition of which arouses the Idea of its infinity” (ibid.) Young (2005) claims that sublime lets us have a taste of “immortality”, which is a matter of not “existing throughout time but of timelessness” (139). Being independent of time and space is the antithetical effect of the second part of sublime in contrast to the first one. Just like Schopenhauer’s “eternal subject”, the pleasure of sublime is justified in the “loss of the personal self” and finding it to be “in different degrees of completeness...with the transcendent Reality” (Otto, 1928, 36). William James (2008) says that “what I felt on these occasions was a temporary loss of my own identity” upon describing a sublime experience (262). Harmon (2013) also calls denial of the

identification “with a narrower desiring self” but rather it is the “becoming” of “the eternal serene subject of knowledge” which is a state of peace and true happiness (71). The identity moves beyond this particular flesh and bone and becomes a “totality”. “Flowing out of the ego” is experienced where one comes “to live a thousand-fold” (Young, 2005, 103).

We feel ourselves elevated because we identify ourselves with the powers of nature, ascribing their vast impact to ourselves, because our fantasy rests on the wings of the storm as we roar into the heights and wander into the depths of infinity. Thus we ourselves expand into a boundless natural power. (Whyte, 2011, 9).

3. Environmental Implications of Sublime

In the first phase of sublime the otherness of nature is realized, nature as independent, autonomous and different than us; and in the second phase, an oceanic feeling surpasses the subject, the expansion of self is experienced revealing our interconnected relation with nature. Hence, sublime is both “at once daunting” and “attracting”; as Otto puts it (1928) “it humbles and at the same time exalts us, circumscribes and extends us beyond ourselves, on the one hand releasing in us a feeling analogous to fear, and on the other joining us” (57). This would have various environmental implications of the dual character of sublime both establishing a sense personhood that nature can be seen as “Other”, feel “respect” and “humility” and at the same time acknowledge the interconnected relation with every existent being Each phase balances the other, each time reminding its own power and effect, giving proper amount for “quieting” the “ego” (Bauer, 2005, 7). “A self-identity” is obtained which is “not excessively self-focused but also not excessively other-focused...an identity that incorporates others without losing the self” (Bauer, 2005, 8).

“What is that light which shines right through me and strikes my heart without hurting? It fills me with terror and burning love: with terror inasmuch as I am utterly other than it, with burning love in that I am akin to it.” (Augustine, 1998, 227)

3.1. The Non-pleasurable Part: Seeing Nature as “Other”

3.1.1. Humility

In the first phase of sublime subject feels an overwhelming grandeur or power of nature in which his/her self seems finite, insignificant and little; however, this overwhelming confrontation with nature unveils nature's independent identity. Cronon (1995) describes this feature as the “radical otherness of nature”; it is a statehood in which nature is “forever beyond the borders of our linguistic universe” (56). This “radical otherness” becomes an entity that has to be acknowledged and accepted as the way it is. This otherness creates “an indispensable corrective to human arrogance” (Hitt, 1999, 606) which is “humility”. It shows that the non-human nature exists as a “world we did not create”.

It is the perfect description of “humble state” where the ego will be “quietened” as Bauer calls it (7). What is more, Pascal (1958) in his *Pensees* asserts that “a discourse on humility” is a deed “a few man do” (107, sect. 377). According to Martin (2012) Pascal enforces the duality of “*sublimis-humilis*” relation and proposes that the “individual's smallness in the cosmos” is bounded upon the phenomena of sublime (85). Pascal (1958) indeed states that “with space the universe envelops me and engulfs me like an atom, by thought I comprehend the world (97/sect. 348) and “man is great in that he knows himself as miserable” (107/sect. 397). The humbling state of Pascal in which man feels himself “miserable” reminds us Schopenhauer's (1969) portray of sublime as “vanishing nothingness” (204). Martin (2012) interprets Pascal's ideas on humility as a case of sublime experience in which “nothingness, the infinite and the divine” is realized, akin to the feeling of being “lost in this corner of the universe” (85). Young (2005) interprets it as realization of “the nothingness of our tenure in space and time, the blink-of-an-eye-ness of our existence, the almost-hereness of death” (138).

It is important to mark that with humility, the self gains not a derogatory status of being but a sincere relation. Humility shall not be confused with lack of self-esteem or “humiliation” (Exline, 2005, 55). Hence, it is not pejorative in the sense of being inferior to others but able to realize that the self is “a relatively small part in a larger scheme of things” (Exline, 2005, 56). In that respect, Spinoza (1665) describes humility as a feeling mingled with pleasure to the “extent that a man knows himself by true reason” (107).

He “understands his own essence” (ibid.). When we realize “our own potency, and our active relation to nature we get joy first, from the recognition of our own power no matter how small, which gives “us *acquiescentia in se ipso*, self-respect and contentedness”, second, from the awareness of an “increased personal, active knowledge of things” which are far more “greater than we are”, and third, from the realization of “active interaction” which “defines us in the total field of nature” (Naess, 2008, 130). With a humble attitude an “empirical connection” will be established between “experiencing nature and overcoming self-importance” (Hill, 1983, 221). Natural surroundings stimulate us to see ourselves *as the way we are* in nature, overcome the anthropocentric prejudices and acknowledge that “we are one among many”, not exclusive or specific, but just a small speck.

3.1.2. *Respect*

The second virtue linked with acknowledging the otherness of nature is respect. In respect, we recognize the existence of the *other* and its difference from us. Respect is a feeling that is “other” directed in which nature is seen “as a world we did not create, a World with its own independent, nonhuman reason for being as it is” (Hitt, 1999, 606). Kant is the first philosopher pointing out the close relationship between sublime and respect. In the feeling of respect, a similar transition of displeasure to pleasure takes place like the case in sublime.

He resembles the negative pleasure felt in sublime to the feeling of moral law. Just like the moral law attacks “satisfaction with oneself” and “strikes down” the “self-conceit” (CroPR, 5:73) of the subject, so does the sublime. At this point, we part ways with Kantian sense of sublime and respect because, it is directed only with human beings due to the common share of reason; however, I would like to integrate respect in a nonhuman world as well. Nevertheless, the inadequacy of Kant’s theory towards the non-rational beings shall not lead us to undermine the close relation he reveals between sublime and respect.

Some contemporary scholars tried to overcome Kant’s deficiency and proposed amendments. For example, Brady (2003) stated that no matter Kant’s theory is criticized to be “human-centered”, it shall not lead us to undermine the “interesting ways” sublime can illuminate, where “a distinct-

ive aesthetic relation between humans and nature” (38) exist.

It is a mistake to construe Kant’s remarks as making ontological and normative claims about humanity’s place in relation to nature. Through experience of the sublime in nature, we recognize that reason gives us the ability, in our freedom, to transcend our phenomenal selves, which belong to nature... it is in that sense that we are not, in the end, overwhelmed by the phenomenal because we have resources beyond how it limits us, but we are also not above or superior to nature. (Brady, 2003, 38)

In short with sublime, “a meaningful connection to nature” is excited in which we recognize the “magnitude and might” (Brady, 2003, 39) of nature independent of our beings. Nature stands with its mysteriousness as a “wholly other”, “canny” and “awful”, “filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment” (Otto, 1928, 40). Seen this way, nature cannot be used “as a means to an end” (ibid.). The distance between the “appreciator and environment” is acknowledged and “the appreciator is placed in a certain way-aesthetically-in relation to an environment” (Otto, 1928, 121). We “become aware of our limits” and recognize the borders where “the other” starts (Taylor, 1986, 105). We accept the distance and difference *as the way it is*, we view them *as the way they are* and “appreciate them in their own terms” (Saito, 2007, 151).

One kind of definition of a good person or a moral person is that person does not impose his or her phantasy on another. That is he or she is willing to acknowledge the reality of other individuals, or even of the tree or the rock. So to be able to stand and listen. That to me is a moral capacity, not just an intellectual one. (Saito, 2007, 151)

This ability to “stand and listen” is a sign of respect. Respect demands “a willingness to submit to nature’s guidance” and listen to “nature’s own story”. Appreciating things as the way they are demands us not to impose our own story upon them and take our view central (Saito, 2007, 152). Taking mountains, deserts and flowers with a “reality apart from our presence, with its own story to tell” demands sensitivity and acceptance (Saito, 2007, 163).

The proper “responsible” behavior towards any creature different than us can take place as long as there is space for its independent identity. Sublime shows us how to value wilderness, a realm where humans are out of its descriptive state. This “liberates” not only “nature” but also ourselves because, we are conscious of our self, we do not overestimate and exaggerate our own power. We do not oscillate between the poles of narcissism and self-debasement. In short, by means of respecting nature, we accept every existent being has certain ends to be who they are, the nonhuman world has an independent status from our standpoint. We understand that we have to “honor” it, “remember and acknowledge the autonomy of the other” and maintain an attitude of “critical self-consciousness in all of our actions” (Cronon, 1995, 89).

3.2. The Pleasurable Part: Seeing Nature as an Extended Self

3.2.1. Attentiveness and Sensitivity

In the second phase, the emotions of astonishment, awe and wonder help us to see nature in its totality and acknowledge its grandeur. This acknowledgement of nature as an “extended Self” will lead one to regard each existent being, living or non-living, attentively or sensitively. Sensitivity and attentiveness are close terms in their consequences; however, attentiveness has broad references and specific scope of extent akin to “mindfulness”, as the Buddhist terminology describe. In amazement and wonder, we reach *that* being, either call it “the heavens”, “the supernatural realm”, *noumenal* or an “expansion of self”, we join and be aware of that bigger “I”. Soelle (2001) goes even further and asserts that “the beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living” (91).

Just like the way an arm cares for the other arm for the aim of cooperation in the body, sublime by means of raising feelings such as amazement, astonishment or wonder may lead us to be more “attentive” to nature to “hear, see, feel and know” its story. One will care to know how to live “in the midst of other lives” (Soelle, 2001, 111). It would remind us that we are not alone, we are more than we know because the world is “a community of all living beings bound one to the other”. Any damage on someone necessarily will “avenge itself” (Soelle, 2001, 112). This “awareness” acts as bedrock for many other virtues. Rolston (1987) claims that “there is no

value without awareness” (189) and the rate of awareness marks the rate of sensitivity one has towards others such as animals, plants and non-living beings with respect to “connection, appreciation” and feeling of “awe” (Leary et al., 2005, 142).

Being “attentive” demands a place to be “unreservedly” present, *right now* and *here*. In that moment of “now” all the sensory perceptions has to be awake with unprejudiced openness. The Zen story of Master Ikkyū takes “attentiveness” as the “highest wisdom” one can have (Soelle, 2001, 176). The mystical relationship of attentiveness to time and other existent begins is to be “present to the people and things you love”. It demands an identification with what you do, how you do as who you are. As C. S. Lewis puts it, it can be summarized as “I am what I do” (Soelle, 2001, 177). Someone with full attentiveness cannot overlook the grandeur of thousand celled eye of a dragonfly or the delicate pattern on a conch shell. Attentiveness demands not just looking but seeing, not just hearing but listening. It demands one to be “there” fully with a total consciousness and awake perception. Therefore, the ecstatic feelings of sublime will lead one to wake up from slumbers of life filled with work and consumption within a limited scope of vision. It takes every kind of ordinary experience to an extraordinary level that is “exclusively unique” (Soelle, 2001, 178).

In an age of exploitation, commodification, and domination we need awe, envelopment, and transcendence. We need, at least occasionally to be confronted with the wild otherness of nature and to be astonished, enchanted, humbled by it. Perhaps it is time that we discover an ecological sublime. (Hitt, 1999, 620)

3.2.2. *Compassion and Love*

Compassion and love are two distinct feelings that can be felt for the “Other” with the concern of their well-being. It is based on an assumption of a common identity, feeling as if the other is also a part of “me”. The second phase of sublime, which leads us to realize the commonality between nature and us, engenders the feelings of compassion and love. Primavesi (2004) asserts that this pleasure we feel upon experiencing sublime phenomena causes us to realize that “things are ultimately intelligible only in terms of each other” (64). In such a conception of the world, “each

is seen as part of an immense complexity of subtly balanced relationships that, like an endless knot, has no loose end from which it can be untangled and put in supposed order” or in other words as if we all are “an island” composed of “the mainland...and the sea surrounding” it (ibid.). In a symbiotic relationship like this, since nature is our “extended self” no one can harm the other”, it will be as if harming oneself. This would be nothing but an instance of the well-known sentiments of, “goodwill and sympathetic and compassionate love for others” which proves that sublime induce in us an affective wisdom (Ardelt, 2005 223). It is obvious that we exist “in” this planet rather than “on” it. (Litfin, 2010, 210).

Ardelt (2005) asserts that in such a state when the ego is quietened, the result is a feeling of sympathetic and compassionate love for others (223). The “thoughts, feelings and behavior of people” are like “me” as well as the non-living things that seem to be without “thoughts” or “feelings”. Then on, each can direct his/her interest “toward the benefit of all beings rather than only themselves and their loved ones” (Ardelt, 2005 231). Leary et. al (2005) mention the notion of the feeling of unity under the rubric of “*allo*-inclusive identity”. They define it as a state in which the “identity goes beyond one’s individual, relational and collective identities”, an embracement of the other, i.e. *allo* means other (137). The idea inherent in this philosophy “is the inclusion of other entities in one’s self-concept instead of merely an identity that extends beyond the individual him or herself” (ibid.).

Maslow (1973) also described transcendence in a manner that has an *allo*-inclusive quality, “behaving and reacting as ends rather than as means to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature and to the cosmos” (292). Therefore, in sublime we feel a “sense of kinship with all living things”, this is a “meta-personal self- scale” in which “no matter” where we are or what we do, there is the intuition that “we are never ever separate from others” (ibid.) which would bring compassion and love.

4. Criticisms and Defenses

4.1. Historical

4.1.1. Criticisms

The first objection is that sublime is no more a valid concept for appreciation of nature but rather its proper object is art. Elkins (2011) is one of the major critiques who supports such oppositions. He claims that sublime shall not “apply to nature but art objects” (77). He argues sublime is a concept that can be used within the “trans-historical category”; it no more satisfies appreciation except in some “particular ranges of artworks” generally made in the 19th century (ibid.). What is more, Elkins (2011) thinks that sublime and other affiliated terms such as “awe, wonder” are used unthoughtfully in the history of philosophy so many times that they lost their significance for appreciation. They are like “blank coins” as if “rubbed by thousand fingers” till they have become “nothing but thin blank disks” (89). Therefore, he suggests to drop the concept altogether from the language and try to define the following peculiar experiences, being “ambushed by the tremendous appearance of the Milky way, pouring from one horizon to another, with Cygnus gleaming in its middle” as the way he sees it with “words as sharp as” he can “manage” (ibid.).

Brady (2002) talks about the same historical oppositions against sublime. The argument states that we are less “awed” and appalled by nature because, we are “less fearful” due to our ability to “control and exercise power over much of nature” with “our developed technological means”. It states that neither the great mountains nor the wide deep oceans “evoke” any “edgy feeling of the sublime” and its “anxious pleasure”. The 18th century concept is an old-fashioned term for the contemporary world since our relationship with nature is less “troubled” than before (174).

4.1.2. Defenses

The first step of the argument is to refute the claim that artifacts, namely the artworks, are the proper candidates for sublime experience. I claim that the original sublime is nature and Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* is a major support for this. Clewis argues that (2010) artistic sublime has a justified role as a proper object. In contrast, Abaci (2008) claims Kant is justified

to dismiss the idea of artistic sublime and acknowledge nature as the “pure sublime”. Kant in his 3rd *Critique* differentiates two types of sublime just like two types of beautiful: impure and pure. Impure sublime are the ones that are “intentionally directed towards our satisfaction” (KU, 5:301), the deliberate act of creating something with a final purpose or end previously had in mind. On the contrary, when the object of appreciation is devoid of any “intentional content” then it is “pure” (ibid.). Taking these into consideration, the impure judgments become the artifacts that are man-made versus the pure ones that are natural. That is why, for Kant the proper object of appreciation in aesthetics is nature rather than art, because pure experience can only depict the necessary elements of aesthetic judgment. Furthermore, both Brady (2002, 173) and Guyer (2005) support the same attitude I defend, that artifacts cannot be “true examples of sublime” since they are “too finite to induce a genuine experience of the sublime” (158).

Moreover, the knowledge we have about nature does not necessarily lead to an impoverishment. In contrast, exploration and invention lays bare the marvels of nature and fascinates more. The impetus behind any scientific discovery of nature is a feeling of wonder. Wonder as Hepburn (2000) denotes is a feeling that does not exhaust itself upon comprehension (203). In contrast, curiosity is a transient feeling vulnerable to temporality. Hence, any information gained about nature, the height of mountains or depth of oceans does not diminish the impression they leave on us. The scientific discoveries do not exhaust the experience but rather pumps up the interest fervently. Nature is not a phenomenon that can be exhausted at any point. A microscopic observation might reveal the millions of cells making up just a single eye tissue; a telescope makes us connect to billion light years far-away stars and galaxies. All these encounters make us realize nature’s power, grandeur and magnificence. In short, the discoveries and inventions lead us to continuous astonishment and amazement that never ends.

4.2. Metaphysical

4.2.1. Criticisms

The second objection is metaphysical with the worry that sublime is a religious term from the discourse of theology, as if a proof of God. Elkins

(2011) in his work *Against the Sublime* asserts that sublime has to be abandoned since it is a concept that “is used principally as a way to smuggle covert religious meaning into texts that are putatively secular” (77). When we look once again to the history of sublime, it is true that in the history of philosophy sublime has been hand in hand with religious discourse and implications. For example, Monk (1960) admits that the particular emotions of “admiration and delight” are actually “passions that are excited by religious contemplation” (80). For Shaftesbury (1996) sublime is not rooted in style but “in divinity”. It is a manifestation of “divinity” in the “mighty nature” and which reveals itself in “that all-loving Deity’s” cosmic and terrestrial oevres (72-4). The contemporary scholars such as Greig (2011) also indicates that the *mysterium tremendum* feature of sublime shares a common root with the religious experience; sublime is the feeling of “spiritual rehabilitation” igniting the “inner spark” of the soul, making it fit for a “spiritual enquiry” (109).

4.2.2. Defenses

First counter-argument is the natural possibility of association of ideas and the connection between feelings. It is a well-known fact that ideas can have connections and associations with one another. For example, one idea can “attract” another and the other can call something else into consciousness (Otto, 1928, 57). The same fact is valid for feelings. Sublime has many affiliated emotions, each resembling, having connections with one another such as terror to dread, awe to amazement, elevation to ecstasy, etc. If any association demands equal uniformity *in toto* then we can assert that sublime feelings *are* religious feelings. However, we have to distinguish between similarity and equal uniformity. I accept that religious feelings have connections and resemblances with sublime; however, they are not the same. The two realms share feelings but the two realms are distinct from each other, one is “aesthetic” and the other is “religious”. Their scope of knowledge and purpose vary significantly from one another. The former is related with the sensory pleasures; the other is related with the acceptance of a divine being and related practices.

The second counter-argument is that sublime is an aesthetic concept. The differentiation of sublime from religious context had a deep demarc-

ation with Kant. Kant strictly noted that sublime is an aesthetic concept that needs no presupposition of a divine being. Brady (2002) also indicates that although some 18th century theorists “associated” sublime with “God’s power symbolized in nature”, with Kant we had a totally “secular” sublime (175). Aesthetic judgments for Kant are “purposive without purpose”, meaning although they seem to be designed as if to have a form or a concept actually they lack one (KU, 5:221, 5:236). It is the function of the subject to unify his/her mental capacities with imagination and understanding and this job of unification causes pleasure/displeasure. Therefore, Kant calls it “subjective purposiveness” rather than “objective purposiveness” (KU, 5:226-7). The aesthetic judgment is significantly distinct from the determining judgments which have a concept or form already presupposed. In this sense, attributing the name of God as the underlying cause for the aesthetic judgments is an attempt of mixing these two judgments. In other words, the underlying reason for the sublime or any natural phenomena can never be God or any kind of divine being in an explicit way of equivalency.

What is more, Elkins’ criticisms are actually a support for our argument, that sublime substitutes religious sentiments within a secularized agenda, without being grounded on a divine being. The scientific discoveries and inventions in astronomy, physics, chemistry and geology gave way to this transformation in the 17th century. Elkins is not aware that his criticisms point that sublime came to the fore due to a “paradigm shift” after this scientific revolution; hence, making peace with sublime and letting its existence enrich our discourse is preferable over rejecting it. We can regard sublime as a secularized substitute of religion without any necessary dependence of a divine being. Brady (2002) explain this with borrowing Hepburn’s term of “metaphysical imagination”. According to Hepburn, metaphysical imagination is the aesthetic experience when we encounter a natural scene and by means of our imagination we connect it with metaphysical feelings and terms. In other words, it is an “aesthetic transcendence” that “precipitate a new, felt awareness of our place in the World”. Sublime affords us to have an “opening out of the felt experience” to other sensory dimensions through an “anxious exhilaration” (177) without any dependence on a divine being.

4.3 Ethical

4.3.1 Criticisms

The first criticism is sublime is anthropocentric. However, this criticism's target is Kantian sublime mainly. In Kant it is the human mind, rationality and freedom that is sublime, not natural objects. This creates a serious problem in environmentalism, giving way to an "*anthropocentric*" view, which leads to a "monstrously megalomaniacal view of the world in which human beings regard themselves as the lords of nature and think of nature as whole as existing only for their sake" (Wood, 1998, 203) or in other words, to an instrumental standpoint entailing a species chauvinism, that humans are superior to other species whose results can be discerned in the ferociously devastating attitudes of the modern technological society.

For example, Godlovitch (2007) criticizes any kind of aesthetic appreciation as anthropocentric that accepts the right of point of view due to having a center of consciousness or apperception. Therefore, he advocates a new theory of acentralism in aesthetic appreciation where there is no such thing as the "point of view of the recipient". As a result, it extends beyond "centers of consciousness and apperceptions" and confers moral perspective even to "mere things" (134). There is no moral differentiation between animate and inanimate; it attributes an "unusual non-perspectival universality". In sublime, there is the centrality of human perception and valuer. Hence, it is experienced from one particular and determinate point of view in contrast to appreciating nature "from any of an infinite number of points of view from which the viewer and, generally, by parity, we do not matter at all". In the same vein, Saito (2007) argues that any appreciation that takes humans in the center for appreciation is anthropocentric; because, it gives them a distinct role with a godlike and "impersonal" position. She proposes an alternative model called "Zen-Buddhist type of non-anthropocentric appreciation" aiming to preserve the unity and continuity between man and nature and overcome the created boundaries (158). In this sense, although she does not clearly refer to sublime, she criticizes extensively the idea of having a central role of perception in aesthetic appreciation which according to her is nothing but imposing our own stories on nature and creating boundaries between nature and human mind.

4.3.2. Defenses

Against the first opposition, I need to emphasize that my argument does not adopt a totally Kantian viewpoint. I defend the view that sublime is a concept that shows our limits, I do not argue that it is a praise of rationality in a similar vein with a Kantian view. So, it is true that sublime is related with *us* rather than nature in the first glimpse. This can be interpreted to be *self-regarding* and *human regarding*, but this self-regarding is not a hierarchical and depreciative view over nature. In contrast, the acknowledgment of our limits brings humility “through which we feel insignificant in the face of powers that exceed us” (Brady, 2002, 179). In other words, it presents a reflection of us. We become conscious of our “self-reflection” (ibid.) by means of looking at nature. The self-regarding is a process of seeing ourselves in the mirror of nature. We become a mere ingredient in the landscape but we are at the same time aware of ourselves as overwhelmed and humbled by particular qualities on nature (Brady, 2002, 181). My thesis might be said to be in Kantian spirit in many ways but differentiates significantly from such emphasizes of rationality and freedom. For example, I do not assert that the commonality we find with nature is only rationality *per se* nor freedom but something that shows our nature-hood. This concept of nature-hood is close to Otto’s concept of creature-hood, however it is different from creature-hood in the sense of being not only created but also being alive. It marks the ability of being conscious and aware that one is “living” right at this moment and place just like any other existent being. It is the feeling of being aware that you are *one* among many. Therefore, although the rejections against Kant may have some right, I think one can still give an account of sublime by being strictly committed to a rational background and save it from the accusations of anthropocentrism.

Against the second objection that sublime takes human perception at the center similar to an “impersonal” or godlike gaze, I claim this is not *anthropocentric* but rather *anthropogeneric*. *Anthropogeneric* means that judgments are human-generated, and shall not be confused with *anthropocentrism*, being human-centered. Aesthetic judgments are response-dependent which means that by definition they demand a creative dialectic between humans and nature. Having a creative dialectic shall not lead us altogether

to discard the existence of a human appreciator. This is like throwing the baby with the bath water. The claim that aesthetic judgments are *anthropogeneric* underlines the fact that it occurs within a human perspective. In that case, disinterestedness involves *anthropogenericism* as a necessary feature of aesthetic judgment which necessitates the human-valuer.

Against Saito's "Zen-Buddhist type of non-anthropocentric appreciation" theory, and Godlovitch's "acentricism", I argue that, *anthropogenericism* indicates the necessity of "subject generator" in an aesthetic appreciation. Aesthetic appreciation in nature is always relational; there is a creative dialectic between humans and nature. Since any philosophical view or ethics without humans does not make sense, it is the same case in aesthetics. Humans *ignite* aesthetic appreciation. Appreciation itself even assumes it by definition, in order for that act to take place, an appreciator has to exist. This is the same case for ethics, we try to find a proper ethical theory or an answer to the question "how *we* shall live" or "how *I* shall act". These questions are directed to particular *subjects*.

To say of any natural thing *n* that *n* is valuable means that *n* is able to be valued, if and when human valuers, *Hs* come along. There is no actual beauty autonomous to the valued and valuable forests cirque lakes, mountains, sequoia trees, sand hill cranes there is aesthetic ignition when humans arrive, the aesthetics emerges relationally with the appearance of the subject generator. (Rolston, 2007, p. 328)

Reminiscent of Thomas Nagel's book (1986), there is not a "view from nowhere", the view is always from somewhere (2). Therefore, we can adopt a kind of aesthetics that can help us appreciate nature without imposing our practical needs, desires and wishes. In other words, I suggest that with disinterestedness, we can both accept the *anthropogeneric* nature of each proposition and appreciate nature's beauty without falling into a relativist discourse. Then, our aesthetic judgments would include a standard for a "universal voice" (Kant, KU, 5:216) without assimilating or imposing our self-concerned interests. Moreover, even the call for "impartiality" and being devoid of self-motivated concerns indicate that disinterestedness is not *anthropocentric*. In contrast, it urges us to refrain from imposing our own practical desires and needs. In other words, the otherness of nature and *anthropogenericism* are not one and the same even though they might look like. The latter is the ontology of how we *make* judgments. Adopting nature's

otherness does not necessarily lead us to have a hierarchical, *anthropocentric* relation with nature.

In short, maintaining the subject-object dichotomy does not entail objectification of nature nor detachment from it. In contrast, aesthetic and other modes of valuing nature can assist “thorough-going absorption and a sympathetic and respectful attitude towards the environment” (Brady, 2003, 70). Accepting “a degree of distance,” does not necessarily lead to an elitist, alien relationship. As Brady puts it, via preserving nature’s “otherness,” in sublime, humans could set a “close relationship,” with nature but at the same time enable others to be themselves. This is the way how “enough distance,” is preserved in any friendship (Brady, 2003, 142). Friends have to let the other to be who they are without assimilating them, otherwise it would not be a friendship but slavery.

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