Recall that beauty is related to the purposiveness of a thing and the pleasure produced by the harmony of the cognitive faculties through the mere contemplation of it.

[I]nsofar as the concept of an object also contains the basis for the object's actuality, the concept is called the thing's purpose, and a thing's harmony with that character of things which is possible only through purposes is called the purposiveness of its form. Hence the purposiveness of nature is a special a priori concept that has its origin solely in reflective judgment. For we cannot attribute to natural products anything like nature's referring them to purposes, but can only use this concept in order to reflect on nature as regards that connection among nature's appearances which is given to us in terms of empirical laws. [CJ, Introduction, IV (20) (180f), emphases added.]

There is a great deal to discuss here concerning Kant's search for an a priori principle behind reflective judgment, its role in acquiring empirical concepts, and Kant's argument for purposiveness as the key to understanding reflective judgments generally and judgments of taste in particular. We'll return to this a bit later.

But first, let's contrast our experience of the beautiful, which is determined by the purposiveness of form, with the sublime, which is related to that which goes beyond form and is not purposive but "wild" and linked to "a higher purposiveness". In his introduction to "Book II: Analytic of the Sublime", Kant says,

(Independent) natural beauty carries with it a purposiveness in its form, by which the object seems as it were predetermined for our power of judgment, so that this beauty constitutes in itself an object of our liking. On the other hand, if something arouses in us, merely in apprehension and without any reasoning on our part, a feeling of the sublime, then it may indeed appear, in its form, contrapurposeful for our power of judgment, incommensurate with our power of exhibition, and as it were violent to our imagination, and yet we judge it all the more sublime for that.…

For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility. Thus the vast ocean heaved up by storms cannot be called sublime. The sight of it is horrible; and one must already have filled one's mind with all sorts of ideas if such an intuition is to attune it to a feeling that is itself sublime, inasmuch as the mind is induced to abandon sensibility and occupy itself with ideas containing a higher purposiveness. [CJ §23 (98f)]

So, as we see in the example above, there are two stages in Kant's account of the sublime, and in each stage two aspects:

1. We attempt to apprehend the intuitively given object as a whole (by means of synthesis) and find it overwhelms our imaginative capacity in terms of its
   a. scale, or
   b. power.

2. We encounter something "greater" in ourselves linked to
   a. reason, and
   b. our humanity.

1 See also CJ, Introduction, VII (29) (189f) for more on the relation of purposiveness to the pleasure we take in the harmony of the cognitive faculties.
The distinction between **scale** and **power** in the first stage of this model enables Kant to distinguish two types of sublime experience:

- **Mathematical Sublime**: This involves the phenomenon of **magnitude** in a central way. For example, a sensation occurs which spontaneously initiates a process in the mind that would result in an intuition of the thing—a “totality”. When the imagination fails to produce the intuition due to its inability to **comprehend** a seemingly endless magnitude as a whole, one senses the **transcendent** power of reason which then results in a feeling of sublimity.²

- **Dynamical Sublime**: This is similar to the mathematical sublime but arises in response to an experience of the overwhelming **power** and force of nature rather than scale or magnitude.

Kant develops his account of the mathematical and dynamical sublime out of concepts introduced in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.³ There he distinguishes between mathematical and dynamical **syntheses** and between mathematical and dynamical **principles**. In relation to the latter distinction, he also distinguishes between two ways things might be combined, by means of **composition** or **connection**. Once again, we encounter fine distinctions in Kant that require a good deal of elaboration.

- **Composition** occurs when you have a combination of **homogeneous** parts that do **not necessarily** belong together. An example might be two identical right triangles that can be brought together to form a square.

![Triangles](image)

The triangles are **homogeneous** parts in space that can be described and related mathematically. They could appear anywhere in space without it affecting their structure or identity. Thus, it’s **not necessary** that they are brought together to form a square. Such a configuration would be merely **contingent**.

- **Connection** occurs when you have a combination of **heterogeneous** parts that **necessarily** belong together. A good example of this would be cause and effect. They are by definition **heterogeneous**—the cause is distinct in principle from its effect. But cause and effect have a **necessary** connection, since every cause has an effect.

² Note: Kant claims that there is a pain associated with the limitations of the imagination. But there is a pleasure associated with the vastness of reason. This opposition produces a kind of affective or felt contradiction. It also takes us beyond external appearances (phenomena), the *a priori* forms of intuition (space and time), and, invokes our own internal idea of greatness as rational and moral beings.

**HOMOGENEITY**
Yes
In space and time, the individual parts look locally the same everywhere.

**NECESSITY**
No
In space and time, there is no logical or causal connection between those parts.

**COMPOSITION**
(Mathematical)

**CONNECTION**
(Dynamical)

Yes
The parts are heterogeneous due to the difference between - the power of outer nature - inner nature (humanity & morality).

Yes
The two parts—inner and outer nature—are necessarily linked in the experience of the sublime.

These concepts—homogeneity, heterogeneity, necessity, contingency, composition, and connection—form the background of Kant’s theory of the sublime in the *Third Critique*.

**Mathematical Sublime**

Kant claims that complications can arise in our intuitive determination of the aesthetic composition of parts with respect to their magnitude. Take, for example, the vast extent of space in the universe. It's often claimed that the universe is infinite or infinitely expanding. In a logical sense, it seems we can grasp that notion rather easily. We appeal to numerical quantities in measuring distances and say that, however many miles the radius of the universe may be, you can always add another mile to it. To reach infinity, you continue this process without end. The same thing holds for the natural numbers. No matter how large a number you have, you can always add 1 to it to get a larger number.

The problem occurs when you try to comprehend such magnitudes aesthetically—by means of intuition. It is here that we reach a limit, where the imagination fails to “hold together” (compose) in one intuition the enormous extent of the object as it is apprehended through the faculty of sensibility. [CJ §26 (108) (252)] Our cognitive powers are overwhelmed. And mathematical calculation won’t help in this context.

[What happens is that] our imagination strives to progress toward infinity, while our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea, and so [the imagination,] our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense, is inadequate to that idea. [CJ §25 (106) (250)]

Here, in the face of our inherent limitations and inadequacy—comparable to the inability to find an adequate concept for the intuition in a judgment of taste—an idea linked to another power arises and shifts our experiential framework.

[The] inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power; and what is absolutely large is not an object of sense, but is the use that judgment makes naturally of certain objects so as to [arouse] this (feeling), and in contrast with that use any other use is small. Hence what is to be called sublime is not the object, but the attunement that the intellect [gets] through a certain presentation that occupies reflective judgment. [CJ §25 (106) (250)]
Thus, reaching in this way the limits of intuition, according to Kant, brings with it the idea of the **sublime**. “We thus find the mathematically sublime in the mere size of objects and in the aesthetic composition of their parts that are regarded as homogeneous and not necessarily connected.” In this way, aesthetic composition reaches its limits and, in doing so “proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense”. [CJ §25 (106) {250}]

The power Kant refers to here is **theoretical reason**, which attempts to reach beyond space and time and demand “absolute totality”.

A somewhat more phenomenological account appears in §27, where Kant compares the breakdown in the capacity of imagination in our experience of the sublime with the pleasure that arises in our aesthetic judgment of the beautiful.

In presenting the sublime in nature the mind feels *agitated*, while in an aesthetic judgment about the beautiful in nature it is in *restful* contemplation. This agitation (above all at its inception) can be compared with a vibration, i.e., with a rapid alternation of repulsion from, and attraction to, one and the same object. If a [thing] is excessive for the imagination (and the imagination is driven to [such excess] as it apprehends [the thing] in intuition), then [the thing] is, as it were, an abyss in which the imagination is afraid to lose itself. Yet, at the same time, for reason’s idea of the supersensible [this same thing] is not excessive but conforms to reason’s law to give rise to such striving by the imagination. Hence [the thing] is now attractive to the same degree to which [formerly] it was repulsive to mere sensibility. The judgment itself, however, always remains only aesthetic here. For it is not based on a determinate concept of the object, and presents merely the subjective play of the mental powers themselves (imagination and reason) as harmonious by virtue of their contrast. [CJ §27 (115) {258}]

**Dynamical Sublime**

A different encounter with the sublime occurs when the forces of outer nature—in space and time—confront us as excessive and **beyond our power to resist or overcome them**.

When this happens, we find inner resources more powerful than nature, viz. our **humanity** and **morality**. In this way, nature is causally responsible for our experience of the dynamical sublime. Our response is caused by the encounter of external nature and our internal (human) nature. Thus, the dynamical sublime is a necessary effect of the forces acting on us.

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4 Wenzel, op. cit.,109, emphases added.