What is the sublime?

“the sublime . . . is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasure which the most learned voluptuary (a person devoted to luxury and sensual pleasure) could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination, and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body, could enjoy.

But as pain is stronger in its operation than pleasure, so death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain; because there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death: nay, what generally makes pain itself, if I may say so, more painful, is that it is considered as an emissary (an agent of another) of this king of terrors.

When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are, delightful . . .” from Burke’s Part I, Sect VII: Of the Sublime.

1. Terror:
   “NO passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.” From Part II Sect I: Terror

2. Power:
   ‘But pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly. So that strength, violence, pain, and terror, are ideas that rush in upon the mind together.” Part II Sect V: Power.

3. Infinity:
   “Infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect and truest test of the sublime . . . But the eye not being able to perceive the bounds of many things, they seem to be infinite, and they produce the same effects as if they were really so. We are deceived in the like manner, if the parts of some large object are so continued to any indefinite number, that the imagination meets no check which may hinder its extending them at pleasure.” Part II, Sect VIII: Infinity.

4. The Sublime and the Beautiful Compared:
   “For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small: beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate; the great out to be solid, and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure . . .” Part II, Sect XXVII: The Sublime and the Beautiful Compared.