

THE PROBLEM OF PURPOSIVENESS AND THE OBJECTIVE VALIDITY OF JUDGMENTS IN KANT'S THEORETICAL PHILOSOPHY

ROLF-PETER HORSTMANN*

The title of this paper is somewhat misleading because talk of “the problem of purposiveness” suggests both that there is a clear-cut conception of purposiveness in Kant’s philosophy and that this conception poses a single basic problem. As everyone who is but a little familiar with Kant’s writings knows, this is definitely not the case. There are already in his theoretical philosophy at least three different contexts in which the conception of purposiveness plays a decisive role in Kant’s thought. The first relates to the possibility of empirical laws of nature and, somehow connected with it, to the possibility of empirical concepts. The second has to do with the theory of natural ends or of organized products of nature. Both these contexts belong to what could be called Kant’s philosophy of nature (in a broad sense), and purposiveness is considered here as a quality that has to be attributed to nature and some of nature’s products. The third context has to do with aesthetics and concerns the explanation of the source of the validity of judgments of aesthetic appraisal. It is by no means clear whether Kant relies on the very same conception of purposiveness in all these contexts. It is more obvious that there is not just one single or dominant problem connected with Kant’s treatment of purposiveness. Not only does the idea of purposiveness in each of these contexts lead to different problems, but there are also some more general problems, the most prominent of which has become, in recent years, the question as to how to integrate the claims Kant makes in these different contexts with respect to purposiveness into the overall framework of his critical philosophy. In what follows I will deal with some aspects of this more general problem under two restrictions. First, I will confine my remarks to those aspects of this problem that concern Kant’s epistemology. This limitation means that I ignore his aesthetic theory and especially his analysis of the so-called judgment of taste. Second, I will limit my remarks to topics that have a connection with the question as to whether and how purposiveness can have a function within the Kantian

* Rolf-Peter Horstmann is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. He has published extensively on topics in Kant and post-Kantian German Idealism. Currently he is Visiting Professor of Philosophy at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.

epistemological framework and whether and how purposiveness fits into Kant's analysis of the conditions of the objective validity of judgments.

So, first of all, why does the topic of purposiveness become a matter of concern in relation to Kant's epistemology at all? In order to explain this one can start with three observations, two of which I take to be fairly uncontroversial. These observations taken together lead to some perplexities. (1) If one takes Kant's first *Critique*, the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in both of its editions (1781 and 1787) to contain the conceptual and argumentative basis of his theory of knowledge and cognition (and if one had to give an unbiased account of its leading ideas), it would be rather likely that the concept of purposiveness of nature plays no major role for the simple reason that in the epistemological parts of the first *Critique* (Transcendental Aesthetic, Transcendental Analytic) this concept does not occur at all (at least not in a philosophically relevant way). This absence means that within the framework of the first *Critique* there seems to have been no compelling reason for Kant to think of purposiveness of nature as an essential element of a theory of empirical knowledge, i.e., of experience, an element without which one could not account for the possibility of experience. (2) Three years after the second edition of the first *Critique* the situation had changed significantly. In his third *Critique*, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* from 1790, or, to be more precise, in both versions of the Introduction to this third *Critique*, we find Kant claiming that without what he now calls the "principle of purposiveness of nature" the very possibility of experience would be incomprehensible. In view of the fact that Kant in the first *Critique* promises to provide all the basic elements that are needed to account for empirical knowledge, i.e., experience, this claim sound surprising and hard to reconcile with the first *Critique*. Already this discrepancy between the first and the third *Critique* is somewhat bewildering and calls for an explanation, especially because Kant nowhere in the third *Critique* even hints at a change in his position with respect to some of his epistemological principles argued for in the first *Critique* in order to account for purposiveness. Quite a number of Kant scholars have embarked upon coming up with very different suggestions and hypotheses.¹ (3) The third somewhat puzzling and perhaps

1. To mention just a few: HANNAH GINSBORG, *THE ROLE OF TASTE IN KANT'S THEORY OF COGNITION* (1990) holds that the first *Critique*, because it cannot account for empirical concept formation, had to be completed by the third *Critique*; JOHN H. ZAMMITO, *THE GENESIS OF KANT'S CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT* (1992) takes the discovery of the cognitive significance of purposiveness, next to its practical and aesthetic value, to be the distinguishing mark of the third *Critique*; Henry E. Allison, *Is the Critique of Judgment "Post-Critical,"* in *THE RECEPTION OF KANT'S CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY: FICHTE, SCHELLING, AND HEGEL* 78 (Sally Sedgwick ed., 2000) claims that the third

not that uncontroversial observation is the following: within the epistemological framework of the first *Critique* the concept of purposiveness of nature is not only not used as a systematically significant concept, but there are quite a few reasons that suggest that it might be difficult to find a place for such a principle employing the resources of the first *Critique* alone. If this were the case, then Kant indeed would have a problem with purposiveness, a problem that jeopardizes his whole critical project.

Now, if one goes along with these observations two questions arise immediately: (1) Why is it that the principle of purposiveness does not or even—if one accepts my third observation—cannot play an epistemologically indispensable role within the first *Critique*, and (2) how does it come that it has to play such a role in the third *Critique*?² The answer to these questions I want to suggest is (a) that the conceptual framework of the first *Critique* proved to be too poor to allow for natural organisms to be genuine objects of nature, and (b) that in order to account for them as natural phenomena one had to bring in the concept of purposiveness as designating an epistemic principle in its own right. Though the answer to the (b)-part might sound familiar it is the (a)-part whose details are, I think, somewhat surprising. My remarks will deal in the first part with my claim concerning the first *Critique* and the second part will address the topic of purposiveness in the third *Critique*.

Critique contains just a re-interpretation of what is meant by systematicity and thus that there is no discrepancy between the first *Critique* and the third *Critique*; Paul Guyer, *Kant on the Systematicity of Nature: Two Puzzles*, 20 HIST. PHIL. Q. 277 (2003) seems to agree with Allison on this point; RACHEL ZUCKERT, KANT ON BEAUTY AND BIOLOGY: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE *CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT* (2007) sees the difference in Kant's tackling a new problem in the third *Critique*, i.e., the problem of the lawfulness of the contingent.

2. These questions are not the same as the question as to why there has to be a transcendental deduction for the principle of purposiveness, though indeed all these questions are connected. In an earlier paper dealing with the latter question, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Why There Has to Be a Transcendental Deduction in Kant's Critique of Judgment*, in *KANT'S TRANSCENDENTAL DEDUCTIONS* 157 (Eckart Förster ed., 1989), I made the distinction between a "critical" and a "systematic" problem with respect to the principle of purposiveness in Kant. Regarding the systematic problem, I suggested a somewhat terminological solution by proposing that there is a shift in the meaning of the term "transcendental" that allows Kant to think of his views about purposiveness in the first *Critique* and the third *Critique* as being compatible. Though I still believe this shift to be the case I want in the paper here to pursue a different line of thought. I want to argue now that the shift in terminology is just an indicator for a substantial change in position by Kant, the reasons for which I want to discuss here.

I

Let me begin with pointing out the limitations of Kant's theory as presented in the first *Critique* regarding natural organisms. In order to understand these limitations one has to give a (very sketchy and very basic) summary of the central claims of the first *Critique* with regard to the possibility of knowledge. The basic idea in the first *Critique* is that we can have knowledge only of what we produce by ourselves. It is this claim that qualifies Kant as a constructivist in epistemology. Thus if we want to have knowledge of some object we have to produce or construe it. This task is done in a rather straightforward way in that we perform some operations on a material that is given to us as a manifold of sensations. This material, out of which we construe objects ("the sensible given"), is as such cognitively neutral, i.e., it is undetermined with respect to its objective content. In order to produce the representation of an object the cognizing subject has to manipulate the given material in such a way that it gives rise to the representation of the object (and not just to a fleeting stream of maybe connected or maybe unconnected impressions). This manipulation is done by the operations of two of our cognitive faculties. Kant calls these faculties "sensibility" and "understanding." They provide us with the formal conditions of the possibility of an object of knowledge, i.e., with those conditions without which the very concept of an object (of knowledge) would be unobtainable for us.

Sensibility makes available the spatio-temporal framework into which we have to position as either inside or outside of us whatever is to become an object for us. This idea that the space-time frame necessary for any object of which we can have knowledge is rooted in a subjective capacity of a cognizing subject makes Kant an idealist. The understanding contributes the rules of composition that constitute the very concept of an object (the concept of an "*Objekt überhaupt*")³ and to which all the spatio-temporally given material out of which we construe objects has to conform. These rules are called categories. They can be found independently from any experience through a "transcendental" investigation. This claim makes Kant a transcendental idealist.

What is important to notice here is that for Kant these constructive efforts lead not just to the concept of an object (of knowledge) but they also allow us to produce a specific conception of nature, namely the

3. See IMMANUEL KANT, *CRITIQUE OF PURE REASON* B158 (Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood trans., 1998) (1787) [hereinafter KANT, *PURE REASON*]. The *Critique of Pure Reason* is quoted according to the original pagination of the first (A) and second (B) editions.

conception of nature as a homogenous and unified (*einheitliches*) whole of objects. This is so because whatever is to become an object for us has to satisfy according to Kant at least three relational requirements imposed categorically by the understanding: (1) it has to be conceived as a persisting substance with changeable attributes,⁴ (2) any change of its state has to be subject to the law of causality, and (3) it has to stand in mutual causal relation (*Wechselwirkung*) with all other objects that exist at the same time. These three requirements are supposed to guarantee that everything we experience as an object in space and time is somehow connected with everything else in a rule-governed fashion, thus giving rise to the view that the sum total (*Inbegriff*) of all objects that can appear to us, i.e., nature, have to form an orderly structured whole. In a certain sense this requirement comes as no surprise given the initial conviction that, in order to be known, objects have to be taken as subject-dependant constructions. Thus according to this outline what Kant presents in the first *Critique*—at least in the parts preceding the *Transcendental Dialectic*—is a theory of object constitution in order to account for the epistemic accessibility of the world by us. Kant’s message is quite clear: if there is any sensory input—in his terminology, any matter of sensation (*Materie der Empfindung*)—given to us then we get objects out of this input that qualify as objects for knowledge and which fit together into a unified ensemble of objects called nature only under the condition that we constitute them by subjecting this input to the rules of our understanding under the conditions of our sensibility. This process is the reason these rules are called by Kant “constitutive principles”: they constitute objects and provide these objects with traits that allow them to build up nature as a coherent whole, which in turn makes it possible for us to have uniformity of experience.

Kant is cautious enough not to claim that these constructive means, the categories, determine objects right down to the empirical individual level. For example the specific qualities an individual object of experience may have, let us say: this specific shade of red, the particular changes it might undergo—maybe turning yellow from red, or the special causal relations it could stand in—perhaps causing something other to burn, none of which are determined by the principles of object constitution that the categories bring about. These characteristics are contingent. “Contingent” here means that there is no categorical basis for the specific empirical features of an

4. See *id.* at B224. Whether the *First Analogy* allows one to speak of objects as individual substances is by no means clear because what is said there is, strictly speaking, that there is just one substance whose states are the individual things.

object—that these determinate features are just what they are, independently from the functioning of any of the categories. Presumably these characteristics have something to do with the material of sensation. This does not mean that there are no rules at all that regulate these features. On the contrary, they are all governed by empirical laws that again are contingent from a categorical point of view.

If this is a correct (though somewhat superficial) characterization of Kant's approach concerning the possibility of empirical knowledge and experience⁵ in the first *Critique*, then how does the idea that nature has to be organized in a purposeful way in order for us to have experience, i.e., knowledge of objects, fit in? Before I answer this question I have to point out shortly what is meant by this idea. It is easy to imagine that nature is organized in such a way that it would be impossible for us to discover any regularities or any order in what we experience. In such a situation we would just be confronted with a lot of distinct and ever-changing perceptions whose sequences would be utterly chaotic and which would have no stable characters at all.⁶ If this were the case, experience, in the sense of empirical knowledge, would be impossible because there would be no opportunity for us to even arrive at empirical concepts, let alone to establish empirical laws. Without having such laws at our disposal, it makes no sense to speak of experience or knowledge in a comprehensible way. Thus, in order to account for the possibility of empirical knowledge one has to presuppose that nature is organized in such a way that is purposeful to our epistemic needs. How detailed a Kantian picture of the world the organization of nature has to be in order to meet these needs is in itself an interesting question that cannot be tackled here. At any rate, the organization of nature has to be such that it allows for concepts and laws.

This idea that nature has to be organized purposefully in order for us to have knowledge has some interesting and far-reaching consequences, which Kant spells out extensively in his third *Critique*. Two of these consequences have to be mentioned. The first is that this reasoning gives rise to the thought of the unavoidability of the assumption of a supersensible being that is responsible for the purposeful organization of nature. The second, which is of immediate interest here, is that the idea of purposiveness of nature seems to introduce into our conception of nature a second type of causality next to the mechanical causality of moving forces (*bewegende Kräfte*), namely a causality according to ends. It is especially

5. As is well known, Kant defines experience as empirical knowledge. See *id.* at B147, B166.

6. For Kant's example of the cinnabar see *id.* at A100.

this second consequence of the idea of a purposefully organized nature that gives rise to tensions with central claims of the first *Critique*, especially with the claim that causal relations are irreversible, a claim that leads to conceding a privileged status to mechanical causality.

Now, the question is: Can the idea of a purposefully organized nature play a constitutive role within Kant's first-*Critique* model as to how for us experience or empirical knowledge is possible? Or in other words: If one agrees that constitutive principles have to be founded in categories, can the concept of purposiveness function as a category in the first *Critique*? The answer seems to me to be no. This is so because of four reasons. In my eyes, three of them are good reasons, the fourth—again in my eyes—a very good reason. The first (1) consists of a puzzlement that arises from a rather external perspective. The second (2) has to do with an assessment of the task of a transcendental investigation of the conditions of knowledge. The third (3) concerns the concept of causality. And the fourth (4) is that Kant himself speaks out against the categorical status of purposiveness. I will comment shortly on each of these reasons.

(1) The conception of nature as purposefully organized to our epistemic needs by a super-sensible organizer seems to be in some ways at odds with Kant's leading epistemological credo, that nature as an object of knowledge is constituted by us (the knowing subjects). One is inclined to think that if it is us who produce nature as an epistemic object by our category-guided conceptual activities we should assume that we do it correctly, in the sense of purposefully, because otherwise there would be nothing for us to know or, even worse, the whole concept of a knowing subject would make no sense. Thus if nature, as an object of knowledge, is supposed to be our product then the very fact that there is such an object seems to somehow guarantee that nature is purposefully organized. If it were otherwise we could forget about objects at all. Hence to introduce the idea of the purposiveness of nature, as a necessary condition for its epistemic accessibility, seems to be a bit puzzling and rightly so. One might say that it is not nature, understood as a product of our conceptual activities, that is meant to be purposefully organized but rather it is a claim about nature in the sense of the data, the matter of sensation. This argument, however, is just poor reasoning because it infers the constitution of a cause from what is taken to be its effects. It might just as well be chance instead of purposiveness that accounts for the organization of the material of sensation.

(2) The second reason has to do with the epistemological task of the first *Critique*. Kant is quite explicit about this task. He wants to provide a transcendental justification (whatever that might be) of a list of concepts

without which we could not have the representation of an object of knowledge, or, in his terminology, he wants to give a transcendental account “that and how” certain concepts are constitutive of the concept of an object.⁷ Kant does not hint in the first *Critique* at entertaining the view that part of this task is to come up with a theory of how the raw material of sensation, out of which we construe our objects of knowledge, has to be organized. On the contrary: Kant is quite cautious in this respect. He just refers to these data as to the “given manifold of sensibility” that somehow is an enabling condition for our having representations of objects but with respect to which we cannot say anything as to their constitution and their behavior. And Kant is well advised to be cautious with regard to the characteristics of this sensible manifold considered in itself because otherwise Kant himself would give support to the widely held view—effectively formulated for the first time by F.H. Jacobi—that his distinction between appearances and things in themselves is unconvincing. Thus there is not really a place for the idea of a purposefully organized nature or for the concept of purposiveness to function as an object-constituting concept in the first *Critique* because Kant does not want to think of this concept as a constitutive principle based on a category.

(3) This leads directly to the third reason, which is the most frequently articulated misgiving in this context. What if it were the case that Kant in the first *Critique* would permit the concept of purposiveness to be an object-constituting concept, i.e., a category? This would seem to bring about some problems with regard to the status and the function of the category of causality because it would make it unavoidable to allow the notion of what Kant calls “causality according to ends” to enter the list of conditions necessary for the constitution of objects of knowledge next to or even in opposition to the notion of a mechanical causality of moving forces. What this means and what it implies are hard to figure out exactly. But it is fairly clear that there are strong motives on Kant’s part in the first *Critique* to stay away from giving purposiveness a categorical status.⁸

(4) Fortunately there are not only these three reasons one can put forward in order to substantiate the claim that the idea of a purposefully organized nature does not make that much sense in the context of the first *Critique*. In my eyes, the most convincing reason is that Kant himself

7. See *id.* at B80 (Kant’s characterization of transcendental cognition); see also *id.* at B122, B197 (noting his remark on the problem of the objective validity of the subjective conditions of cognition at B122 and the highest principle of all synthetic judgments at B197).

8. Among other things, giving purposiveness a categorical status would make it difficult to reject the objective validity of the argument from design. See *id.* at A648.

indicates what the role of the principle of purposiveness within the framework of the first *Critique* should be: it should be taken to be a useful but by no means objectivity grounding maxim of reason. Kant outlines his standpoint quite explicitly, though in a rather obscure way, in two little chapters that form the *Appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic*.⁹ The upshot of what he says there is the following: the principle of purposiveness and some other principles are indeed necessary assumptions in order to guide our scientific research that consists in finding empirical laws. But this does not mean that they are “of constitutive use, so that [through this use] the concepts of certain objects would thereby be given”¹⁰ They are necessary heuristic principles or methodological devices,¹¹ they represent unavoidable hypotheses of reason, and their status is that of regulative principles.¹² As such they are subjective principles that have nothing to do with the constitution of an object of knowledge but satisfy a necessary interest of reason. All this is nicely expressed in Kant’s definition of a maxim of reason, which reads:

I call all subjective principles that are taken not from the constitution of the object but from the interest of reason in regard to a certain possible perfection of the cognition of this object, maxims of reason. Thus there are maxims of speculative reason, which rest solely on reason’s speculative interest, even though it may seem as if they were objective principles.¹³

Thus I conclude that the principle of purposiveness does not fit into the neat and clean picture Kant presents of the world as an object of knowledge in the first *Critique*. In this world we constitute these objects in

9. *Id.* at B670–B732.

10. *Id.* at B672.

11. *Id.*

12. *Id.* at B675.

13. *Id.* at B694. In the original German:

Ich nenne alle subjektiven Grundsätze, die nicht von der Beschaffenheit des Objekts, sondern dem Interesse der Vernunft, in Ansehung einer gewissen möglichen Vollkommenheit der Erkenntnis dieses Objekts, hergenommen sind, Maximen der Vernunft. So gibt es Maximen der spekulativen Vernunft, die lediglich auf dem spekulativen Interesse derselben beruhen, ob es zwar scheinen mag, sie wären objective Prinzipien.

Though the message Kant wants to convey in the *Appendix* is quite clear there are, as is well known, some problems connected with his way to integrate this message into the overall framework of his epistemological convictions as presented in the first *Critique*. It is especially not that easy to understand his claim that these maxims have the status of subjective or logical principles that nevertheless presuppose transcendental principles. See Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Der Anhang zur transzendentalen Dialektik*, in KRITIK DER REINEN VERNUNFT 525, 525 (Georg Mohr & Marcus Willaschek eds., 1998).

an idealistic framework in such a way that they and their behavior can be explained by matter, motion, and moving forces according to the principles of Newtonian physics. Whatever does not conform to these principles is for us not an object of knowledge at all. And if we cannot help having recourse to the notion of purposiveness in order to describe (*beurteilen*) something or other, we are perfectly free to do so if we bear in mind that such a description has no explanatory force because it has no basis in the constitution of the object of knowledge but is just a subjective condition, an impulse or a drive that somehow is connected with reason.

II

What then could have been a reason for Kant to change this position and to claim as he definitely does in the third *Critique*¹⁴ that without the principle of purposiveness there would be no unity of experience and thus no experience possible? One way to approach this question is to ask a different question, namely: What could be thought to be missing in Kant's ultimately physicalistic epistemic universe as outlined in the first *Critique* of which we like to claim to have experience or empirical knowledge? One can imagine quite a number of candidates. In the first place, and most remarkably, what appears to be completely absent from Kant's epistemically accessible world are all non-physical objects (with the exception of mathematical objects). Thus, it looks as if not only rather questionable objects like souls or spirits or apparitions are excluded from Kant's world of experience, but also objects that are considered to be much more strongly embedded in our everyday life, like: economical (the market, money, insurance); juridical (contract, rights); political (state, society); and cultural (university, opera) objects. One might object that all these objects are artifacts, manufactured by us, and as such also constituted by us according to rules, and are thus objects of knowledge. However, this effort on behalf of a Kantian epistemic world to integrate those objects has its own problems¹⁵ that Kant never cared to address (but Hegel did) because quite obviously Kant was not interested in the question

14. E.g., IMMANUEL KANT, *CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT* 181–86, at 20–26 (Werner S. Pluhar trans., 1987) (1790) [hereinafter KANT, *JUDGMENT*] (Introduction, Section V); *id.* at 204¹, 204¹ n.13, at 393 (First Introduction); *id.* at 208¹, at 396–97 (First Introduction). Page references, e.g., 181–86, are to the *Akademie* edition, with the primed numbers referring to volume 20 and the unprimed numbers referring to volume 5 of the *Akademie* edition. The second page number, e.g., 20–26, refers to the corresponding page in the 1987 Pluhar edition, as translated by Pluhar.

15. For example, why is it that there are no reliable forecasts of the behavior of such objects? Why don't we know the rules of construction of these objects?

of non-physical objects of any kind at all. But even if one is prepared to accept Kant's austere physicalistic conception in the first *Critique* as to what counts as an object of knowledge belonging to nature it can be regarded as too poor because one can have the suspicion that it cannot even do justice to all natural phenomena.

Three shortcomings should be mentioned: (1) Kant's account cannot integrate organisms into the fabric of what for him is objective nature, because this account seems to allow only objects constituted by mechanical processes as objectively real occurrences in the world and seems to have no basis to incorporate physical objects whose form and constitution cannot be explained mechanically by the causal interaction of moving forces alone. (2) What can be seen to be a problem with Kant's account is also that it cannot leave room for non-physical properties like aesthetic qualities as something not exclusively entrenched in the cognizing subject but as "rooted in the object." This particular rooting is so because only physical properties can be taken as real, while everything else has to count as only subjective. (3) However, what can be considered the most serious deficiency of Kant's model is that ultimately it cannot account for empirical or contingent physical qualities either because it cannot give an explanation of the possibility of empirical laws, i.e., it cannot account for, to allude to Kant's words, the possibility of the lawfulness of the contingent. The reason is that without empirical laws we would not be able to determine what qualifies as an empirical quality and what does not.

These three points are not picked randomly. They address the three main problems Kant deals with in his third *Critique*, the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. And with respect to all these problems Kant wants to convince us that the notion of the purposiveness of nature is necessary in order to solve them. Now, it is important to realize right at the beginning that this claim is not meant to be a claim as to how nature conceived independently of us is organized in itself, i.e., it is not the claim that what we have to presuppose as the matter of sensation is purposefully organized. Such a claim would be utterly senseless in a Kantian world, a claim of bad metaphysics, because we have not the slightest idea as to how this "in itself" is arranged. What is meant with this claim is that we have to think of the epistemically accessible nature, i.e., that nature that is constituted by us, as purposefully organized. Or in other words, the claim that the notion of a purposefully organized nature is necessary in order for us to have experience is meant to answer the challenge set up by the task to integrate empirical laws, beauty, and organisms within an idealistic

framework of nature as constituted by us into what counts as an objective world.

Very obviously three questions put themselves immediately. (1) Why is it that empirical laws, beauty and organisms become so important for Kant's project? (2) How can the idea of the purposiveness of nature accomplish the task to make sense of empirical laws and to integrate beauty and organisms into Kant's epistemic universe? (3) Is the solution Kant suggests successful, at least in his eyes? The answer to the last question seems to me to be: in part yes and in part no. The "yes"-part refers to his theory of beauty and of organisms, the "no"-part to the problem of empirical laws. The reasons I have for this negative judgment on the success of Kant's solution in the case of the empirical-law-problem are somewhat superficial.¹⁶ Nonetheless they are serious enough not to be dismissed easily. But I want to avoid a discussion of this topic within the confines of this paper and hence I just drop it. An exhaustive answer to the first question, even if restricted to beauty and organisms, cannot be given here either. Such an answer would mean to go into the details of Kant's philosophical development.¹⁷ It must suffice to say that many of those who deal with this development have observed that Kant had a long-standing interest in issues concerning aesthetics starting in the 1760s. In the 1780s he became more interested in topics concerning empirical sciences¹⁸ and in

16. Here a sketch of two of these reasons: (1) I take it that the so-called "transition-problem" in the *Opus postumum*, i.e., the problem of a transition from the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* to (empirical) physics, consists in wrestling with the question of the possibility of empirical laws. Cf. DINA EMUNDTS, KANTS ÜBERGANGSKONZEPTION IM *OPUS POSTUMUM*: ZUR ROLLE DES NACHLAßWERKES FÜR DIE GRUNDLEGUNG DER EMPIRISCHEN PHYSIK (2004) (though Emundts thinks that this question does not arise out of problems within the third *Critique*). The thesis that the solution to the problem of empirical laws as suggested in the introductions to the third *Critique* lacks elaboration in the third *Critique* itself and has to be substantiated elsewhere, i.e., in the *Opus postumum*, is also put forward—with a different emphasis—by ECKART FÖRSTER, KANT'S FINAL SYNTHESIS: AN ESSAY ON THE *OPUS POSTUMUM* 1–24 (2000). If Kant were of the opinion that the third *Critique* had solved this problem, why then does he have this long-lasting late obsession with it? (2) The problem of the possibility of empirical laws plays an important role in both the printed and the unprinted versions of the introduction to the third *Critique*. However, one cannot say that this problem is addressed directly in the work itself, neither in the part on the aesthetic power of judgment nor in the teleological part. Thus it is hard to figure out what Kant would take to be the solution of this problem in the third *Critique*. At any rate there is no explicit solution presented by Kant.

17. For an informative overview of this development as well as of the voluminous literature dealing with it, see ANGELICA NUZZO, KANT AND THE UNITY OF REASON (2005).

18. See generally MICHAEL FRIEDMAN, KANT AND THE EXACT SCIENCES (1992); EMUNDTS, *supra* note 16. It makes sense to think of Kant as becoming interested in the philosophical status of the concept of purposiveness. This is not only because of more general epistemological questions but also because of biology and botany (Kant mentions Linné quite often). This is because, in these disciplines, the principle of purposiveness is used often just as an empirical principle. In Kant's eyes, this use of the principle of purposiveness as an empirical principle is a serious obstacle to thinking of these disciplines as sciences. If this principle could be shown to be based on an *a priori* or even

the development of what are now called life sciences, especially biology and botany.¹⁹ However, it is not just this biographical background that can count as a motive for connecting beauty and organisms. It should be mentioned that, at least for Kant, the connection between beauty and organisms is quite intimate for philosophical reasons as well. According to him, both point to or hint at a purposefully organized nature because neither the one nor the other could be explained as belonging to the objective elements of constituted nature without relying on the notion of purposiveness. This is indicated quite nicely already in Kant's letter to Reinhold (Dec. 1787) where Kant mentions for the first time the project of a *Critique of Taste* as a third part of philosophy, a project which then became the third *Critique*. There Kant characterizes this third part of his philosophy as teleology, though at that time he apparently did not even think of a theory of organisms as contained in this part but—as his working title suggests—conceived of it as an aesthetic theory.²⁰

This leaves us with the second question: how does the concept of purposiveness contribute to thinking of beauty and organisms as belonging to the objective elements of (by us) constituted nature? Even this question will not be answered in its entirety because the explanation Kant gives as to how beauty presupposes purposiveness is quite different from the one presented in the case of organisms.²¹ And to deal with both questions here

transcendental principle then one could accept these disciplines as sciences. That the question of how to think of disciplines like biology and botany as sciences might have played a role in Kant's interest in the concept of purposiveness could be seen confirmed by a footnote at the end of Section VIII of the Introduction to the third *Critique* where he writes: "It is of use: to try of concepts which one needs as empirical principles a transcendental definition if there is reason to assume that they stand in a relation [*in Verwandtschaft stehen*] to the pure faculty of cognition a priori." KANT, JUDGMENT, *supra* note 14, at 230 (translation revised).

19. See ZAMMITO, *supra* note 1.

20. See ECKART FÖRSTER, THE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF PHILOSOPHY 103, 135–37 (Brady Bowman trans., 2012) for an interpretation of the letter in a way that allows Kant to take teleology to be a cover term both for aesthetics and organisms.

21. In the case of beauty, Kant argues roughly as follows: objects as far as they are constituted by us, i.e., as far as they are possible objects of knowledge, have to be such that their constitution by us can stimulate our cognitive faculties to enter into what Kant calls "the free play of faculties." In order to do this, objects of knowledge have to be made up purposefully for the sake of these faculties. This is a subjective necessity, not an objective necessity. There is no rule for being able to judge (*beurteilen*) the constitution of an object of knowledge as beautiful because if objects were not constituted purposefully (by us), i.e., if they could not stimulate the free play, they could not be beautiful, and thus presumably not objects for us. This line of reasoning leads to interesting questions: (1) Are aesthetically neutral objects possible or must every possible object of knowledge have an aesthetic value? (2) Can ugliness be interpreted as absence of beauty or must it be taken as a self-standing, autonomous property? (3) Can aesthetic properties belong in *sensu stricto* only to objects of nature and of art? If so, does this mean that no "beautiful souls" or beautiful (moral) feelings are possible?

is too much. I will concentrate on organisms or, in Kant's terminology, "natural ends."

Here there is a basic dilemma. The one horn of it is the following: in order to think of natural ends or organisms as objects of knowledge we have to take them to be constituted by us in the very same way, i.e., according to the very same rules, as every other object that can be an object of knowledge is constituted, otherwise they could not be objects for us. This means we have to be able to interpret them as physical objects and this requirement means—because of the validity of the category of causality—we must interpret them as the products of causal-mechanical processes, i.e., as products of the interaction of moving forces. But—and this is the other horn of the dilemma—at the same time we have to acknowledge that we cannot account for organisms adequately by relying exclusively on those rules that are constitutive of objects of knowledge. This is so, as mentioned already earlier, because with these rules alone we can explain neither the production (*Hervorbringung*) of their forms nor their inner constitution. In order to do this we have to introduce the concept-pair "whole and part" and to claim that an object whose form cannot be explained causal-mechanically is to be conceived as a whole for the sake of which its parts are organized in a certain way (and the other way round from the perspective of the parts). Talk that uses the phrase "for the sake of" in order to describe the form of an organism already is talk invoking the notion of purposiveness because it implicitly makes use of the representation of an end and the means to realize it. Thus there is the dilemma that for an organism, in order to be an objective part of the epistemically accessible nature, it must be determined (in the sense of constituted) by the categories and at the same time it has to be acknowledged that the categories are not available in order to bring this determination about (because with them alone one cannot account for their form and their inner constitution).

Now, the options Kant has for avoiding this dilemma are subject to several constraints. Two are especially noteworthy. (1) Kant cannot just introduce the concept of purposiveness as an additional category if he does not want to jeopardize the very basis of his critical epistemology as outlined in the first *Critique*. This is not only because of his claim that his list of fundamental, object-constituting concepts (categories) is a complete list (that means that his categories are not merely necessary but also sufficient in order to give us the concept of an object) but also because there seems to be no way to make causality compatible with purposiveness.

(2) Kant cannot declare organisms to be normal physical objects whose form just happens to be not subject to causal mechanical explanations, because this move would eliminate organisms as a genuine class of objects from the realm of epistemically accessible objects. The solution Kant eventually ends up with is well known and there is no need to go into the details here.²² He declares the concept of purposiveness to be a subjective transcendental principle of the reflective power of judgment and thus the principle by which we can judge (*beurteilen*) organisms. What is meant by this formula exactly is hard to figure out. However, what is quite easy to see is why Kant could think that this solution can help save organisms as a legitimate class of real objects in nature as it is constituted by us in accordance with our epistemic needs. The leading idea could be thus articulated: if nature, (understood as an object of knowledge), has to be conceived of as containing two kinds of real objects, namely those whose form can be explained by causal-mechanical processes and those whose form can only be accounted for by introducing purposeful structures, then there must be principles (concepts) determining their constitution in such a way that both kinds of objects can be integrated into nature as distinctive kinds of natural objects. If there are good reasons (and Kant thinks there are) to claim that these principles are such that they allow only objects whose form can be explained in a causal-mechanical way to be genuine objects of knowledge then in order to account for organisms as authentic, full-blown objects as parts of an epistemically accessible nature there must be some special principle according to which they are constituted by us. Otherwise, organisms would be but subjective and in some contexts useful fictions somehow made up from and based on representations of correctly constituted, i.e., real, physical objects. Such a principle cannot be based on one of the standard concepts of object constitution because these concepts cannot explain what makes organisms a special kind of objects, i.e., their form. Thus it has to be a principle that is constitutive with respect to objects of nature, the special forms of which cannot be explained by causal-mechanical processes, i.e., that are constitutive of organisms. At the same time this special principle has to be taken as constitutive in a different sense from the “normal” constitutive principles (based on the categories). This special principle is constitutive in the sense that it provides the means for us to accept as a real object something that does not conform in every respect to the conceptual demands on what a real

22. See Rolf-Peter Horstmann, *Why Must There Be a Transcendental Deduction in Kant's Critique of Judgment?*, in *KANT'S TRANSCENDENTAL DEDUCTIONS: THE THREE CRITIQUES AND THE OPUS POSTUMUM* 157, 157 (Eckart Förster ed., 1989).

object is. This makes it a subjective principle because it is just necessary for us in order to allow organisms to be judged (*beurteilt*)—not explained—as real objects within the categorically constituted realm of nature or within what could be called “our nature.” And it has to be the principle of purposiveness because, according to Kant, only on the basis of this principle can one give an account of the origin of the form of organisms.

As already said above—this is just meant to be a short sketch of what I take to be Kant’s leading idea in introducing the principle of purposiveness in the third *Critique* as a necessary constitutive, i.e., in his language a transcendental, principle which nevertheless is only subjectively valid. The principle of purposiveness—understood as a means of allowing organisms to be real objects of nature within a philosophical framework whose distinctive claim is that what is real is constituted by us—seems to me to answer a problem that Kant in the first *Critique* either did not recognize or did not think of as a problem. Whether this answer really is convincing depends on how one assesses the plausibility of the main elements of Kant’s theory of purposiveness as presented in the third *Critique*. It also depends on how this answer can be brought in line with what Kant takes to be the problems it solves. These elements as well as those problems have not even been touched here.²³ Among the elements Kant relies on in this context is first of all his conception of a reflective power of judgment that is introduced in order to make sure that the principle of purposiveness can be thought of as constitutive without making it an objective principle. Among the problems Kant hopes to solve with his theory of purposiveness, the most prominent is what he calls the antinomy of the power of reflective judgment. This power is a contradiction between the causal-mechanical and teleological views of nature and which can be resolved only if one gives both views a regulative status. But neither the elements nor the problems Kant addresses, nor the problems connected with Kant’s discussion can be dealt with in this paper.

So, what then should be taken to be the positive result of Kant’s occupation with purposiveness in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*? If one is inclined to follow the line of reasoning presented here, the most remarkable outcome seems to me that Kant in the third *Critique* succeeds (at least in principle) to integrate organisms into the domain of real objects

23. For a very informative discussion of both the elements and the problems, as well as the problems connected with them, see Hannah Ginsborg, *Kant’s Aesthetics and Teleology*, STAN. ENCYCLOPEDIA PHIL. (Feb. 13, 2013), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/kant-aesthetics> (last visited Oct. 9, 2013).

(of knowledge) without giving up his idealistic conception of object constitution as developed in the first *Critique*. Organisms are genuine members of a nature that is considered to be the product of our conceptual activities though their production requires a somewhat special conceptual tool, namely the principle of purposiveness—this statement in my eyes summarizes adequately the position he is arguing for. But one should also bear in mind that it is not only the topic of organisms that is at stake for Kant when it comes to purposiveness. As was already mentioned, for Kant purposiveness understood subjectively is fundamental for his aesthetic theory, and understood objectively it is the key to almost everything that has to be counted as contingent for our epistemic abilities, thus giving the basis for what could be called his theory of the empirical (laws, concepts, etc.). And, last but not least, it should not be disregarded that this conception of purposiveness opens for Kant the way to give what he thinks to be a rational justification of the inevitability of the idea of God, thereby transforming an essential element of metaphysics from a natural disposition (in the first *Critique*) into something that reason demands.

All this did not preclude that Kant already in his time and until now did not earn that much recognition for his principle of purposiveness especially in its teleological version from those who thought of themselves as his followers. It is not without irony that it was G.W.F. Hegel—one of Kant's most profound critics and at the same time one of his most careful readers—who was quite convinced that this principle had its peculiar merits in philosophy. In section 204 of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830) Hegel writes, “[w]ith the concept of inner purposiveness, Kant has revitalized the idea in general and especially the idea of life.”²⁴ Though this assessment might not find support that easily in the letter of Kant's philosophy, it certainly captures its spirit.²⁵

24. G.W.F. HEGEL, ENZYKLOPÄDIE DER PHILOSOPHISCHEN WISSENSCHAFTEN IM GRUNDRISSE 178 (Friedhelm Nicolin & Otto Pöggeler eds., 1959) (1830) (translation by author). In the original German: “[m]it dem Begriffe von innerer Zweckmäßigkeit hat Kant die Idee überhaupt und insbesondere die des Lebens wieder erweckt.”

25. *See id.* This text has a somewhat complicated history. It originates from some notes I made almost five years ago with the aim to transform them into a paper to be presented at an event designed to celebrate the 60th birthday of Paul Guyer. Somehow this event never took place. I nevertheless pursued the topic and drafted a couple of versions that I presented orally at several institutions over the years. Though the birthday is long gone I still think of this final version of the paper as an homage to Paul Guyer, the eminent Kant scholar and a very good friend. I am, as always, grateful to Dina Emundts for her helpful comments on almost all versions of this text.