7 The Antinomy of Teleological Judgment

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I address two deceptively simple questions: (1) What is the antinomy of teleological judgment? (2) What is its resolution? While both questions have received sustained scholarly attention over the years, it turns out that satisfactory answers have proved elusive, and in some cases very basic questions that naturally arise in answering these questions have not even been clearly posed. With respect to the first question (addressed in Section 7.2), I argue (in Section 7.2.1) that the most plausible line of interpretation of the antinomy of teleological judgment has it consisting in a contradiction between two regulative principles. At the same time, this interpretation faces two challenges. The first challenge (raised in Section 7.2.2) concerns whether there is really any contradiction between the regulative principles, a question that is motivated, at least initially, by several sentences in §70 whose intent is not patently obvious. I maintain that a careful reading of these passages allows one to see the point Kant wants to make and why he would want to make it. I also argue that straightforwardly philosophical grounds support the idea that there is a genuine contradiction in the antinomy so understood. The second challenge concerns what the proofs of the regulative principles might be. In the case of the mechanical regulative principle (addressed in Section 7.2.3), I articulate three possible lines of argument, argue that two are manifestly inadequate, and settle on the third as the most attractive option on offer, even though it too is not entirely unproblematic. In the non-mechanical case, I tentatively suggest (in Section 7.2.4) that Kant’s argument is based on the limitations of our cognitive powers along with the related idea that the possibility of organisms lies in the supersensible.

With respect to the second main question (addressed in Section 7.3), I argue that a satisfactory resolution of the antinomy remains elusive, despite our very best attempts. For Kant’s discussion (in §§72–3) of the four different possible alternative systems that aim to account for
teleology reveals them to be unsatisfactory and, what’s more, does not shed substantive light on the nature of Kant’s own resolution (Section 7.3.1). Further, taking into account the best interpretations of Kant’s resolution offered up in the scholarly literature reveals the inadequacy of the appeals that have been made to the notion of an intuitive understanding (Section 7.3.1), of the claim that not everything is objectively explicable (Section 7.3.2), and of the idea that mechanism is to be subordinated to teleology (Section 7.3.3), which leaves us with a major unsatisfied desideratum. In addressing these two questions in this way, my primary intent is neither to articulate and defend definitive answers nor to find fault with the best currently available answers, but rather to advance the current state of the debate by suggesting what questions must be pursued further so that we might eventually obtain an adequate interpretation of Kant’s Antinomy of Teleological Judgment.

7.2 The Antinomy of Teleological Judgment

In the Dialectic of the Teleological Power of Judgment, after first explaining (in §69) that the antinomy of teleological judgment pertains to reflecting judgment rather than reason, Kant turns (in §70) to specifying particular principles or maxims of the power of reflecting judgment and to explaining how they could come into conflict. He begins by noting that while the necessary laws that the understanding prescribes to nature a priori (e.g., the Analogies of Experience) do not involve reflecting judgment, the contingent unity of diverse empirical laws capable of giving us unified cognition of the world does, and he mentions two kinds of maxims in particular that reflecting judgment would adopt to promote this end. One kind arises because the understanding places constraints not just on a priori laws but also on empirical laws. A second kind arises because there are “particular experiences” of objects (specifically, of organisms) that we cannot explain mechanically and that require a “special principle” (5:386). If these two maxims conflict, reflecting judgment will be at odds with itself, and we will have an antinomy.

Kant then formulates and discusses two specific statements of pairs of contradictory principles. The first pair states a contradiction at the level of reflecting judgment in such a way that the one maxim requires judgments in terms of mechanical laws, while the other asserts the inadequacy of judgments in terms of mechanical laws in such a way that judgments invoking final or teleological causes are required instead. The second pair, by contrast, states a contradiction between constitutive principles possessing content that is otherwise analogous to that of the first pair. In short, in the first pair, the thesis and antithesis make a claim about
how bodies must be judged and thus take these principles to be regulative, whereas the second pair concerns how objects must be, thereby “transforming” the first pair’s maxims into constitutive principles pertaining to the possibility of objects themselves. Specifically, they read:

Thesis₁: All generation of material things and their forms must be judged as possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.

Antithesis₁: Some products of material nature cannot be judged as possible according to merely mechanical laws (judging them requires an entirely different law of causality, namely, that of final causality).

Thesis₂: All generation of material things is possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws.

Antithesis₂: Some generation of such things is not possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws. (cf. 5:387)

7.2.1 What Is the Antinomy?

In light of these two separate formulations of contradictory theses and antitheses, one fundamental question arises immediately: Which pair of thesis and antithesis statements is supposed to represent the genuine antinomy of teleological judgment? One prima facie attractive option, which gained adherents especially in the first half of the twentieth century, is that of Thesis₂ and Antithesis₂, given that they are clearly contradictory – all generation of material things either is or is not possible in accordance with merely mechanical laws – and Kant notes this feature immediately after presenting them (5:388).¹ One might think further that both Thesis₂ and Antithesis₂ could be proved straightforwardly: Thesis₂ by the argument of the Second Analogy of Experience and Antithesis₂ by the distinctive nature of organisms. Finally, the resolution of the antinomy would follow from well-established Critical principles insofar it would consist simply in distinguishing clearly between constitutive and regulative principles and in rejecting the constitutive pair in favor of the regulative version, a move that could naturally seem to be supported by several crucial sentences in §70 and §71 (esp. 5:387–8 and 5:389).

However, despite its initial appeal, this first option is not ultimately tenable. For one, it contradicts §69, whose main point is to show that the antinomy pertains specifically to reflecting judgment, and Kant reiterates

this point immediately after stating the two pairs of contradictions when he notes that if Thesis\(_c\) and Antithesis\(_c\) represented the antinomy, then it would be an antinomy of reason, not judgment. For another, Kant explicitly states that reason cannot prove either Thesis\(_c\) or Antithesis\(_c\), which would be required for an antinomy to arise. Further, this option is contradicted by the very title of §71 – “Preparation for the Resolution of the Antinomy” – insofar as the distinction between constitutive and regulative principles would already solve the antinomy, rather than simply prepare the way for its resolution. Finally, this option would render otiose the remaining sections of the Dialectic, where the antinomy is supposed to be resolved by means of distinctions other than that between constitutive and regulative principles.\(^2\)

The weaknesses of the first option speak strongly in favor of a second option, which holds that the antinomy consists of Thesis\(_r\) and Antithesis\(_r\). For this second option does concern reflecting judgment, given that Thesis\(_r\) and Antithesis\(_r\) pertain specifically to how we judge things, and not to how they are. It is also not in danger of trying to resolve the antinomy too quickly in one fell swoop simply by distinguishing between regulative and constitutive principles given that this distinction must be taken into account for the antinomy to be formulated in the first place. As a result, this option leaves plenty of work to be accomplished in the following sections, just as it should, and by means of whatever moves are made there, though determining what these moves are and how they resolve the contradiction are questions that still need to be addressed (later in Section 7.3).

### 7.2.2 The First Challenge

This second option, which has come to represent the standard view in more recent literature, faces two significant challenges that have not been squarely addressed so far.\(^3\) The first challenge initially derives from a textual issue and is then backed up by straightforwardly philosophical considerations. In §70, after the statements of the two pairs of contradictions and the explanation referred to earlier (about why the constitutive

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\(^2\) For a more sophisticated interpretation of this kind of view, one that responds to these criticisms, see Marcel Quarfood, *Transcendental Idealism and the Organism* (Stockholm: Almquist and Wiksell, 2004), pp. 166–71. Unfortunately, I do not have space to discuss Quarfood’s interpretation of the nature of the antinomy here.

principles do not constitute the antinomy), one English translation has Kant asserting: “By contrast, the maxims of a reflecting power of judgment that were initially expounded do not in fact contain any contradiction” (5:387). This sentence obviously represents a major problem for the second option, since it would be at the very least extremely bizarre if Kant were to assert an antinomy and then immediately deny that any contradiction holds between its thesis and antithesis. This difficulty, in conjunction with Kant’s reference to the “mere appearance” of an antinomy in §71, could easily tempt one into rejecting this option as well and holding that the entire antinomy is a highly artificial construct motivated solely by architectonic considerations.

This purely textual issue might then be bolstered by philosophical grounds that question whether there is in fact any contradiction between these regulative principles. Why should it be a contradiction for one to look for a mechanical explanation of some phenomenon at the same time that one looks for a teleological explanation? If one takes the possibility of multitasking into account, the contradiction can seem to disappear almost immediately, and the second option can appear to be just as untenable as the first.

However, I maintain that the second option can be successfully defended against this two-fold challenge. As for the textual issue, it is essential to note that the German text reads as follows: “Was dagegen die zuerst vorgetragene Maxime einer reflectirenden Urtheilskraft betrifft, so enthält sie in der That gar keinen Widerspruch” (5:387). Literally (and inelegantly) translated, it reads: “By contrast, what concerns the initially expounded maxim of a reflecting power of judgment, it in fact contains no contradiction at all.” Since it can sound strange to assert that a single maxim contains no contradiction – we expect contradictions between pairs of propositions – one can certainly understand why one might be tempted to transform the singular “maxim” into the plural “maxims.” However, the text does unambiguously use the singular, and one must be open to the possibility that Kant means to refer here only to the first of the principles of reflecting judgment, namely Thesisr. In light of this, I suggest that though the passage is indeed neither completely clear nor

4 This is the Cambridge translation by Guyer and Matthews. The other main English translation, by Pluhar, renders it as follows: “But if we consider instead the two maxims of a power of judgment that reflects [i.e., the first thesis and antithesis above], the first of those two maxims does in fact not contradict [the second] at all”; Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. W. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 267. While this translation is different in some respects, it is still misleading insofar as it maintains that the first maxim does not contradict the second maxim, which thus faces the exact same problem that the translation by Guyer and Matthews does.
fully straightforward in its intent, one can read it as asserting not that Thesis_r does not contradict itself (which would be true, but not particularly significant in the context), but rather (more interestingly) that it does not contradict either the truth or the falsity of either Thesis_c or Antithesis_c, which he had just discussed in the previous paragraph and thus could easily be referring back to without any explicit mention.

Reading the text in this way is not only more faithful to what Kant actually writes, but also allows him to be making a point that is directly relevant to the matter at hand. Insofar as it has not been shown that reason can prove either one of the constitutive principles, it is not clear whether Thesis_c or Antithesis_c is true. Even so, it would be a problem if the one that turned out to be true was inconsistent with Thesis_r. As a result, the sentence in question, as I read it, avoids this potential problem by asserting that Thesis_r does not contradict the truth of either Thesis_c or Antithesis_c, precisely because it is a principle of reflecting judgment and not a constitutive principle. This reading also makes sense of how the passage continues:

For if I say that I must judge the possibility of all events in material nature and hence all forms, as their products, in accordance with merely mechanical laws, I do not thereby say that they are possible only in accordance with such laws successfully (to the exclusion of any other kind of causality); rather, that only indicates that I should always reflect on nature, and hence research the latter, so far as I can, because if it is not made the basis for research then there can be no proper cognition of nature. (5:387)

That is, Kant explains that Thesis_r is not committed to any ontological claim about what makes objects in nature possible and thus would not be threatened by whatever laws (whether mechanical or non-mechanical) in fact make them possible. In the rest of this paragraph Kant then argues that Antithesis_r is similarly not threatened by the truth of Thesis_c (as one might otherwise have thought). For even if we must explain some forms of nature according to a principle of final causality, as Antithesis_r suggests, events in nature might still be possible by mechanical laws alone (as Thesis_c asserts). Because it is the case that neither constitutive principle directly contradicts either of the regulative principles, one can see that the point of this paragraph is not to remove the force of the antinomy, but rather to show that it retains its full strength in the face of a potential difficulty.

If the text can be read in this way, the strictly philosophical part of the objection must still be faced. Is there in fact a contradiction between Thesis_r and Antithesis_r? It is clearly possible in general to seek two
different explanations at once, just as it is in principle possible to undertake two distinct actions simultaneously (e.g., to pat your head and rub your stomach). However, it must be noted that Thesisr and Antithesisr are not simply recommending that one pursue two distinct activities at once. Rather, they are concerned with judgments about what makes the generation of material things possible, and on that point, they assert both that merely mechanical laws make such judgments possible and that merely mechanical laws do not make such judgments possible. Two points are thus crucial to understanding why a genuine contradiction does in fact arise here. First, Thesisr and Antithesisr are not simply recommendations to seek explanations of what makes the generation of natural things possible, but rather express commitments to judgments about such phenomena. Second, these judgments are genuinely contradictory insofar as the one says that mechanical laws all by themselves can be used to judge the possibility of the generation of natural things, while the other says that mechanical laws alone cannot be used to make such judgments. Whatever our judgment about what makes the generation of natural things possible, it must involve either mechanical laws (alone) or laws other than mechanical ones. Accordingly, if one sought explanations that involved both mechanical and teleological laws at the same time, one would be performing activities that contradicted Thesisr insofar as one would be looking for explanations that were not restricted to mechanical laws (alone). So Thesisr and Antithesisr are in fact contradictory on strictly philosophical grounds.

7.2.3 The Second Challenge: The Proof of Thesisr

If one can respond to the first challenge in this way, this line of interpretation still faces a second important challenge. Insofar as the antinomy is to be constituted by Thesisr and Antithesisr, they both require proof. Given that Kant does not have separate sections of the text explicitly dedicated to this task, as he did in the first Critique’s Antinomy of Pure Reason, the challenge here lies in identifying their proofs. Take Thesisr first. The simplest idea here is to suppose that it is justified by the Second Analogy of Experience. However, accepting this suggestion would conflict with the first Critique’s contention that the Second Analogy is a constitutive principle, given that Thesisr is clearly a regulative principle. While one might think that Kant’s view is genuinely problematic in this regard, the standard view – advanced first by Peter McLaughlin and then by Henry Allison – is that there is a significant difference between the Second Analogy and the notion of mechanism involved in mechanical
laws. For however one interprets the notoriously difficult Second Analogy, it specifies that every event must be caused according to a rule (or law), but it neither asserts nor argues that the rule has to be a mechanical law. As a result, even if the Second Analogy plays some role in the justification of the maxim expressed in Thesisr, it does not suffice on its own and would require significant supplementation.

What, then, could Kant’s justification of Thesisr be? Why should we think that all generation must be able to be explained mechanically? Kant’s explicit statements are quite minimal. As we saw above, he notes that without mechanical explanation, “there can be no proper cognition of nature” (5:387). However, he provides no explanation in this context of why that should be the case, and (understandably) the secondary literature is silent on this very basic question.

Three answers could be developed in response to this question. First, one might turn to the Metaphysical Foundations in the hopes that it establishes the necessity of mechanical explanation. After all, as we have seen, Kant argues for three Laws of Mechanics that might fill out and justify the content of Thesisr. The fact that he has already argued for these laws would account for the absence of an explicit justification of Thesisr in the Critique of the Power of Judgment. This line of argument, however, faces two serious problems. First, if its argument were successful, the Metaphysical Foundations would establish mechanical principles for explanation in science proper (in particular, physics), but it would not establish the necessity of mechanical explanation for all of nature (either for sciences other than physics or for non-scientific cognition). Given that organisms fall outside the purview of physics, one would have no reason to think that Thesisr does or even should hold for them. As a result, the scope of this argument would be too narrow to achieve the desired result. Second, even if the Metaphysical Foundations could establish the necessity of mechanical principles for all natural bodies, these principles would still be constitutive rather than regulative, as is required

5 See McLaughlin, Kant’s Critique of Teleology in Biological Explanation, and Allison, “Kant’s Antinomy of Teleological Judgment.”

6 In fact, it does not clearly assert that the cause must be prior to the effect in time, only that the effect must “follow” from the cause (which may not be asserted in a temporal sense).

7 For example, Allison, who is generally charitable to Kant, notes the absence of explicit proofs of Thesis, and Antithesis, – “[w]ithout any further argument, Kant affirms that there are, indeed, two such maxims presupposed by judgment” (“Kant’s Antinomy,” 29) – but he makes no attempt to remedy this deficiency in Kant’s account.

8 The Second Law of Mechanics also draws an important distinction between inert or lifeless matter (matter as such) and life (4:544), which one might be tempted to view as spelling out the meaning of “mechanical” in “mechanical laws.”
for Thesis$_r$. Therefore, this first answer, which relies on the *Metaphysical Foundations* to justify Thesis$_r$, is clearly not satisfactory.

Another possible justification of Thesis$_r$ stems from the fact that teleological explanation presupposes mechanical explanation, despite being its rival. Because the parts of organisms not only are made possible by the organism as a whole, but also must contribute causally to the whole, teleological explanations cannot occur without also invoking mechanical explanations. For example, it is essential to the tree that its leaves contribute to its maintenance through mechanical processes, even if the leaves depend on the tree as a whole for their existence, functioning, and maintenance. Thus, when Kant says that we would have no cognition of nature without mechanical explanation, one might think that he is making this claim on the grounds that the only other kind of explanation available to us employs mechanical explanation too, so there is simply no way around it in our search for cognition. Such a justification would not address someone skeptical about our ability to provide any explanation at all, but Kant does not seem to be concerned with such an extreme view in this context. The fatal difficulty for this second justification, however, is that, given its very starting point (namely, teleological explanation), it precludes the possibility of a *purely* mechanical explanation of such phenomena, as Thesis$_r$ requires. That is, Thesis$_r$ states that the possibility of generation be judged in accordance with *merely* mechanical laws, not mechanical *and* teleological laws. As a result, this second answer is clearly inadequate as well.

A third, and perhaps most promising, answer draws on what reflective judgment is required for and what it is supposed to accomplish. In the first paragraph of §70, after distinguishing between general a priori and particular empirical laws, Kant notes:

> There can be such great diversity and dissimilarity among [the latter] that the power of judgment itself must serve as a principle even in order merely to investigate the appearances of nature in accordance with a law and spy one out, because it requires one for a guideline if it is to have any hope of an interconnected experiential cognition in accordance with a thoroughgoing lawfulness of nature or of its unity in accordance with empirical laws. (5:386)

That is, the unity of empirical laws is not given, but rather must be discovered, and reflecting judgment is required for that insofar as it must try to organize particular phenomena in such a way that they fall under particular laws that can, in turn, be unified within a larger theoretical framework of more general laws.

Even granting the necessity of the reflecting power of judgment for the discovery of the unity of empirical laws, however, the question still
remains as to what justifies Thesisₜ, with its emphasis on specifically mechanical laws. Why think that mechanical laws are necessary to this end? Three bits of textual evidence hint at an answer to this question. First, Kant’s initial description of this maxim is that the maxim “is provided to it [i.e., reflection] by the mere understanding a priori” (5:386). The idea here is that empirical phenomena and empirical laws will be constrained by a priori laws, and insofar as mechanical laws have an a priori foundation in the understanding (in the guise of the Second Analogy or the Laws of Mechanics), it makes sense to consider right away the constraints that they place on the discovery of particular empirical laws and any unity that they might possess at some later stage. Second, Kant begins §71 by arguing that one “can by no means prove the impossibility of the generation of organized products of nature through the mere mechanism of nature” (5:388). If one cannot prove that all generation of natural material products does not occur according to mechanical laws, one might be tempted to at least proceed on the assumption that it must always be possible to explain such generation according to mechanical laws. It would therefore make sense to start looking for an explanation along those lines. Third, later in §71 Kant remarks that in reflection one “always remains open for any mechanical explanatory grounds, and never strays from the sensible world” (5:389). That is, while one might be tempted to appeal to highly theoretical concepts in attempting to explain the generation of natural phenomena, one must always be open to specifically mechanical explanation on the grounds that it keeps one firmly rooted in the sensible world, which must form the basis for any “interconnected experiential cognition.” So not only should one look to build off the a priori constraints of the understanding’s mechanical principles, which serve as a fixed point in the search for unity, but one should also try to keep as close to what is given in sensible experience in working up to a unified set of empirical laws, given that mechanical explanations stay close to the empirical evidence and should also always be possible, at least in principle. Though the textual evidence for this interpretation is both fairly scant and widely scattered so that one could certainly question whether it is ultimately convincing, it is still, I take it, the most attractive justification of Thesisₜ currently on offer.

7.2.4 The Second Challenge: The Proof of Antithesisₜ

If this justification of Thesisₜ is adequate, what about Antithesisₜ? Antithesisₜ states that the generation of some material objects cannot be judged as possible according to mere mechanical laws. In §§69–73 Kant does not
argue for this assertion beyond noting that “particular experiences” suggest such a “special principle” (5:386). Given the Analytic of the Teleological Power of Judgment, the reader can reasonably assume, however, that it is experiences of organisms that suggest teleological explanations. Later, as we saw above, Kant claims more explicitly that “it would be absurd for humans even . . . to hope that there may yet arise a Newton who could make comprehensible even the generation of a blade of grass according to natural laws that no intention has ordered” (§75, 5:400), a claim that is reminiscent of very similar remarks he had made early in his pre-Critical period (e.g., 1:230). However, such assertions simply make one want to know all the more why the generation of blades of grass and other organisms cannot be judged according to mechanical laws. That is, why are organisms mechanically inexplicable for us?

McLaughlin has argued that an organism is not mechanically explicable because, as a natural end, “its parts (as far as their existence and their form are concerned) are possible only through their relation to the whole . . . [and] its parts can be combined into a whole by being reciprocally the cause and effect of their form” (5:373). That is, an organism has a different causal structure from what machines have, since its parts are possible only through the whole (the organism as a whole causes its organs, cells, etc.) and its parts form a whole due to their reciprocally causing each other (the cells and organs interact in ways that bring about the whole organism). More specifically, plants and animals have the powers of growth, reproduction, and self-maintenance. A machine or artifact, by contrast, is mechanically explicable because its parts have the properties and powers they do independently of any larger wholes that they might form. A clock may well have parts that interact with each other reciprocally, but a clock does not cause its parts and the parts do not cause each other, even if they are there for the sake of each other. In short, a clock does not grow, reproduce, or maintain its parts as an organism does. A further difference is that artifacts are not natural ends, given that they are caused by an external agent according to a conscious intention.

Hannah Ginsborg rejects this understanding of the mechanical inexplicability of organisms on the grounds that “there is no less of a need for teleology in understanding a machine such as a watch, than there is in understanding an organism.” That is, both watches and birds involve relations between their parts that are determined by the nature of the

9 McLaughlin, Kant’s Critique of Teleology in Biological Explanation, pp. 152–3.
whole (even if watches are not natural ends but rather artificial products). Granted, watches cannot reproduce or maintain themselves, but that does not detract from the fact that they are products of design and thus require teleological explanation just as much as birds do. Accordingly, Ginsborg argues that what makes an organism mechanically inexplicable is the fact that it cannot be explained in terms of "the mere forces of matter as such," or the fundamental properties of matter, whether it be in general or particular kinds of matter. In the Metaphysical Foundations, for instance, Kant develops an account of attractive and repulsive forces inherent in matter that explains how bodies can fill a determinate region of space and communicate motion (e.g., in collisions according to the Laws of Mechanics). Insofar as an organism’s reproduction, growth, and maintenance cannot be explained solely by such attractive and repulsive forces and the Laws of Mechanics, an organism is said to be mechanically inexplicable in Ginsborg’s sense.

Two questions in this debate need to be distinguished. First: Is the antinomy concerned merely with the origin of organisms, or is it concerned primarily with the daily functioning of organisms? Second: Is an organism mechanically inexplicable because its parts are possible only through the causal efficacy of the whole, as McLaughlin maintains, or is it rather due to the special complexity inherent in an organism, one that is fundamentally different from the complexity that machines have, as Ginsborg holds?

Regarding the first question, it is somewhat surprising that no definitive answer is immediately provided by any of the contexts that are obviously relevant to Kant’s discussions of organisms (even if certain statements, e.g., at 5:389–90, point in one direction). In fact, a careful reading of the statement of the antinomy shows that it is ambiguous on this very point, since Antithesis refers to “products of material nature,” which suggests that functioning is at issue, while Thesis refers to the “generation of material things,” which indicates that the origin of organisms is Kant’s concern. Nor do Kant’s various reflections on the debate between advocates of pre-formation and proponents of epigenesis decide the issue. Given this impasse, one could appeal to the analogy between the origin of organisms and Kant’s concern with the first state of the

12 See Mark Fischer, “Organisms and Teleology in Kant’s Natural Philosophy,” PhD dissertation, Emory University, 2007, for detailed discussion of Kant’s position on this issue.
world in the first *Critique*’s First Antinomy. However, it is difficult to see that the origin of organisms is particularly crucial to the unity of laws, which is what reflective judgment is supposed to bring about. So insofar as the unity of empirical laws is the issue, it would seem to be the regular functioning of organisms that is the central topic of the Antinomy. However, this question is deserving of further research.

Regarding the second question, several striking passages seem relevant. In the first paragraph of §71, Kant emphasizes how the limitations of our cognitive faculties preclude us from comprehending how organisms are actually possible. Kant thus remarks about organisms: “we have no insight into their primary internal ground, and thus we cannot reach the internal and completely sufficient principle of the possibility of a nature (which lies in the supersensible) at all” (5:388). What this passage suggests is that we lack insight into what makes organisms possible, given that it lies in the supersensible and we have no insight into the supersensible.13 Along similar lines, he considers seriously the possibility that what is specific to organisms requires a kind of causality that cannot lie either “in material nature or in its intelligible substratum” (5:388), and we cannot have a priori cognition of that kind of causality: “About this our reason, which is extremely limited with regard to the concept of causality if the latter is supposed to be specified a priori, can give us no information whatsoever” (5:389). Kant also says emphatically that he is claiming only that when we seek mechanical explanations, “human reason ... will never be able to discover the least ground of what constitutes what is specific in a natural end” (5:388). If we can grasp mechanical laws but cannot grasp what makes organisms possible, then it is natural to infer that mechanical laws cannot be used to explain the possibility of organisms so far as we can judge (even if mechanical laws could ultimately be used to explain the possibility of organisms in a way that we could not understand). Even if organisms turn out to be possible according to mechanical laws, or even if mechanical and final causation were ultimately grounded in a single principle, in its judgment our reason can neither reconcile these modes of explanation nor grasp their unifying principle, given that it would lie in “the inner ground of nature itself, which is unknown to us” (5:388). As a result of the limitations of our cognitive powers, we have no choice but to adopt a maxim that goes beyond mechanical laws if we are to have any chance of explaining, or even of starting to explain, organisms. These passages thus suggest that

13 It is unfortunate that Kant does not directly address the question of how we can know that the possibility of an organism must lie in the supersensible.
Antithesis\textsubscript{p} is justified by our experiencing organisms as specific natural ends whose ground lies beyond the mechanical explanations that are available to us.

What thus emerges from identifying the antinomy of teleological judgment as constituted by Thesis\textsubscript{p} and Antithesis\textsubscript{p} is that they do contradict each other, as is required for an antinomy, and that lines of argument can be identified that would prove, or at least go some way toward providing argumentative support for, both Thesis\textsubscript{p} and Antithesis\textsubscript{p}, which would satisfy another fundamental requirement for the presence of an antinomy. What is striking about the lines of argument we have found for Thesis\textsubscript{p} and Antithesis\textsubscript{p}, tentative though they may be, is not only that they contribute to the unity of empirical laws but also that they do so in rather different ways. What recommends mechanical explanations in Thesis\textsubscript{p} is ultimately their proximity to the phenomena, since that must be one fixed point for reflecting judgment in its attempt to find unity among the laws of experience. What supports Antithesis\textsubscript{p}, by contrast, is the fact – if it is one – that the possibility of organisms lies beyond experience in the supersensible and as such requires a mode of explanation different from that in terms of mechanical laws. In short, if Thesis\textsubscript{p} contributes to the unity of empirical laws by starting close to the phenomena, Antithesis\textsubscript{p} recognizes the necessity of allowing a role to what is distant from the immediate phenomena (in the supersensible).

7.3 The Resolution of the Antinomy of Teleological Judgment

The second main question that inevitably arises with respect to the Antinomy of Teleological Judgment concerns its resolution. Certain aspects of this resolution can be determined from the most basic features of the resolutions that Kant develops for the antinomies of pure theoretical and practical reason. Accordingly, Transcendental Realism is allegedly presupposed by the Thesis and the Antithesis, and Transcendental Idealism is required for the contradiction between the Thesis and Antithesis to be avoided and the resolution achieved. Since Kant seems to address these issues in a way that connects to the topic at hand in §§72–3, it is worth considering the content of these paragraphs and how they might contribute to the resolution before facing the resolution directly.

7.3.1 Four Alternative Accounts of Teleology (§§72–3)

In §72 Kant lays out four different kinds of objective systems that would attempt to explain purposiveness in some ultimate way. He first
distinguishes between an *idealism* and a *realism* of natural ends. The former asserts that, notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, all purposiveness in nature is *unintentional*, i.e., the result of causes that do not require conscious intentions, while the latter claims that some purposiveness is in fact *intentional*. He then focuses on two kinds of “idealist” positions. The purposiveness of nature can take the form, he asserts, of either a lifeless matter or a lifeless God.14 (1) Epicurus and Democritus are proponents of the former view, (2) Spinoza of the latter. Kant thinks that the former view’s reduction of final causation to a purely physical ground in the form of mechanical laws of motion is unworthy of serious consideration, though he does go on to refute it. The latter view, by contrast, which reduces final causation to the fatalism of a hyperphysical and supersensible ground of all of nature by saying that the world follows not from God’s understanding or will but rather from the divine nature by a blind necessity, is more difficult to refute since the concept of the original being it employs is, he thinks, not even intelligible.

Kant continues his discussion by considering the “realist” positions, which likewise divide into physical and hyperphysical versions by tracing organisms back to either living matter or a living God. The former (3) asserts that nature is teleological, whether in the form of a plurality of individual living substances (as Aristotle seems to maintain in the *Metaphysica*) or a single world-soul (as one might try to understand Plato’s view), and is called hylozoism. The latter (4) attributes purposiveness to the “original ground of the world-whole” (5:392), i.e., God, and is called theism. In a footnote, Kant claims that these four positions exhaust the possible options and suggests that one should give up all such objective assertions as to the ultimate explanation of purposes so as to “weigh our judgment critically, merely in relation to our cognitive faculty” (ibid.), which will result in non-dogmatic maxims for the use of our cognitive faculties.

In §73 Kant then argues that all four accounts just described are unsuccessful in their attempts to explain the purposiveness of nature. (1) Kant’s objection to Epicurus’ account is that by denying the difference between final and mechanistic causality and by asserting that everything, including what appears as a purpose in nature, is caused by blind chance, Epicurus cannot provide adequate accounts of two phenomena that stand in need of explanation. One is that our concepts of ends bear an analogy to generated products, or artifacts. The other is that generation actually occurs in accord with mechanical laws. The first

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14 Both positions invoke “lifeless” since, on the idealist position, purposiveness reduces to a “blind” mechanism of one kind or another.
phenomenon remains unexplained because ends, which on his account are produced by purely mechanical laws, are unlike objects that we produce according to our own intentions, and to say that they correspond due to blind chance explains nothing at all. Similarly, to say that blind chance brings it about that ends are generated according to the laws of motion is explanatorily vacuous, because what one wants to know is how the laws of motion produce such ends, and “blind chance” precludes insight on this point. In fact, Kant concludes by noting that given his reduction of natural events to the laws of motion Epicurus is not even in a position to explain the illusion of teleological judgments (that is, our being tempted to invoke final causes).

(2) Kant’s analysis highlights several distinctive features of Spinoza’s position. Instead of asserting that an original being endowed with understanding brings about living creatures according to certain intended ends, Spinoza holds that living beings subsist as necessary accidents within a necessary substance that is devoid of any understanding. Spinoza’s position has an immediate advantage over other accounts insofar as living organisms have a kind of unity by virtue of their subsisting in one and the same substance (rather than being distinct substances). However, Kant repeatedly emphasizes that this kind of ontological unity is distinct from the unity of ends or purposes, which is a unity of a very special kind. Specifically, on Spinoza’s view living beings follow with blind necessity from a being that has no understanding, which is inconsistent with the possibility of either a unified purpose or any intentionality, both of which require contingency in the effect and intelligibility in the cause. As a result, Spinoza’s position cannot account for what is specific to purposes.

(3) Kant’s principal objection to hylozoism is based on its inability to explain the possibility of living matter a priori. Against the possibility of living matter, Kant repeats his objection from the Metaphysical Foundations (4:544) that the concept of living matter contains a contradiction in terms, since the concept of inertia, which is essential to matter as such, just means “lifelessness.” Against the possibility of a living matter (whether in the form of individual substances or in the world-soul) his main point here is that there is no a priori and non-circular explanation of its basic concept. Experience might be able to establish the possibility of organisms by revealing their actuality, but the requisite kind of experience would be a posteriori, not a priori. One could derive the concept of an organism from the concept of living matter, but only if one has

15 Insofar as Spinoza clearly maintains that thought is an attribute of the one infinite necessary substance, Kant’s interpretation seems odd, if not uncharitable.
antecedent a priori grounds to accept the concept of living matter, and such grounds are precisely what was lacking for the concept of an organism in the first place. As a result, hylozoism cannot explain purposiveness, but rather presupposes it.16

(4) Kant concedes that theism has one advantage over the other three dogmatic explanations, namely, that by positing the divine understanding as the cause of the world, it at least starts with a notion that involves genuinely intentional causality. The problem it faces, however, is that its account of purposiveness is ultimately dogmatic, at least when determining judgment is involved. To establish that God is the cause of the purposiveness of organisms, one would have to prove that matter could not generate purposiveness by means of its mechanistic causality, but our cognitive abilities are too limited to rule out such a possibility. Instead, given our cognitive limitations, we have to judge the generation of organisms as caused by a supreme understanding, but such judgments occur only at the level of reflecting rather than determining judgment. Thus, a theistic account of purposiveness is not justified.

Now it would be natural to expect that these four accounts of the systematicity of nature would be relevant to the antinomy because they illustrate how important philosophers of the past make the assumption that generates the antinomial conflict, and that Kant’s own position can avoid this conflict by rejecting that assumption. However, this natural expectation does not fit well with Kant’s actual discussion. For one, Kant devotes all of §73 to refuting these accounts on their own terms, which is not at all required for the antinomy; he has already stated the propositions that form a contradiction and there is thus no need to argue their internal inconsistency. For another, Kant sometimes suggests that what leads these accounts astray is that they do not rest “satisfied with speculation within the boundaries of the mere cognition of nature” but rather attempt to connect the concept of final causes with the “highest point in the series of causes” (5:390), but what he repeatedly stresses about these accounts is their dogmatic intent. That is, their concern is with “objective principles of the possibility of things” (5:391) rather than with a properly critical analysis of our subjective faculties and the subjective maxims that we adopt. If, however, they are dogmatic in this sense, then they do not illustrate either Thesisr or Antithesisr, do not make the assumption that leads to the antinomial conflict, and are not directly relevant to understanding Kant’s resolution, however it is understood, given that it must be at the level of reflecting judgment and its maxims.

16 Kant’s argument against hylozoism seems to be either uncharitable or question-begging.
Unfortunately, not only are all four of these systems deemed inadequate, it is also difficult to see that they shed much light on the nature of Kant’s own resolution to the antinomy. For as we saw above, no explicit reference is made to Transcendental Realism in Thesis, and Antithesis, or in the arguments one might formulate on their behalf, and Transcendental Idealism seems to be important in this context primarily insofar as it helps in the diagnosis of the failures of the dogmatic positions. How it is involved in resolving the contradiction and explaining the possibility and nature of organisms is not immediately obvious. These limitations suggest that the antinomy of teleological judgment has a special dynamic of its own.

7.3.2 The Notion of an Intuitive Understanding

So what is this special dynamic and how it is relevant to a philosophically satisfying resolution of the antinomy? In §§76–7 Kant devotes considerable attention to describing the discursive nature of our human understanding and how it contrasts with an intuitive understanding (whether or not such an understanding actually exists). Since our understanding uses concepts to grasp whatever particular objects happen to be given to us (through sensibility), there is a distinction for us between possibility and actuality as well as between constitutive and regulative principles. Since an intuitive understanding would grasp all features of all objects immediately, it would not, Kant claims, distinguish between possibility and actuality and it would also have no place for regulative principles. As a result of these remarks, several authors have claimed that Kant’s discussion of these different kinds of understandings is crucial to his resolution of the antinomy.

For example, Eckart Förster, who has recently distinguished very carefully in Kant’s texts between the notion of an intuitive understanding and that of an intellectual intuition, argues that the notion of an intuitive understanding is central to Kant’s resolution of the antinomy on the basis of two main points:

Because all perceptions are appearances that always arise individually in sensibility as passive (A99), the understanding must combine them according to mechanical perspectives in order to make cognition of them. That is the one point. Since we must at the same time judge some perceptions teleologically, we can combine them with the mechanism of sensibility by tracing the unity of both

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back to the super-sensible substrate of nature. We can do that only with the help of concepts of ends, but since we cognize that the concept of an end is a peculiarity of a discursive understanding and not that of an intuitive understanding, we do not need to ascribe this concept of an end to the substrate itself. That is the other.18

So the basic idea underlying Förster’s interpretation of the resolution is that because the concept of an end is peculiar to our discursive understanding, it need not be attributed to the substrate of nature.

However, two aspects of Förster’s explanation of Kant’s position are, it seems, unsatisfying. First, it is difficult to see, on Förster’s account, how exactly it follows from the specifically discursive nature of our understanding that we must attempt to explain the world according to mechanical principles. Even if it is true that particulars are given to us and that we must then find general rules (or laws) to cover them, and even if it is true that there is an element of contingency involved when general rules (or laws) are selected to cover them, neither truth directly entails the necessity of mechanical explanation, which maintains the priority of the parts over the whole. For if one takes into account only the concept of a discursive understanding, such an understanding could, it seems, encounter, or be given, either a part or a whole. As a result, it is only if one assumes that the part is given and that the whole is not, that mechanical explanation becomes necessary for us. Yet nowhere has this claim been argued for. So it is not clear that the discursivity of our understanding is as closely connected to mechanism as Förster maintains.

Second, and more seriously for understanding Kant’s resolution, Förster’s idea of an end that is peculiar to our discursive understanding is not sufficient to resolve the contradiction asserted in Thesis, and Antithesis. The fact that an intuitive understanding might be able to understand the possibility of organisms does not entail that we can understand such a possibility, so Antithesis remains in full force. At the same time, Thesis is not threatened by what an intuitive understanding can do or by the fact that it operates differently from us.19 As a result, nothing in this line of thought has shown that either Thesis or Antithesis is false (even if there could be a being for which neither would be true)

19 Alix Cohen, “Kant’s Antinomy of Reflective Judgment: A Re-Evaluation,” Teorema 23 (2004): 183–97, p. 193, similarly notes that the conflict between regulative principles for our discursive understanding is not immediately removed due to a reference to an intuitive understanding.
and therefore nothing has removed the contradiction between them.\textsuperscript{20} While Kant’s reflections on the differences between a discursive and an intuitive understanding and on their general philosophical importance are fascinating and one can immediately see why they would have such tremendous significance for later German Idealists, they are best seen as part of the larger context for Kant’s resolution of the antinomy, rather than as articulating the resolution itself. Some further move is clearly still needed.

### 7.3.3 Subcontraries and the Assumption of Objective Inexplicability

Peter McLaughlin, by contrast, places much less explicit emphasis on the possible implications that an intuitive understanding might have for resolving the antinomy. Instead, his basic strategy is to use the specific resolution of the Antinomies in the first \textit{Critique} as a model for understanding the resolution of the antinomy of teleological judgment. This strategy allows him to focus on (1) the formal resolution of the antinomy and on (2) whether we must in fact be able to explain everything, for the contradiction disappears, he maintains, once we give up that assumption. Regarding the first point, McLaughlin states: “The form in which this antinomy is resolved \ldots is the subcontrary form. It is shown that, the false presupposition having been exposed and rejected, both thesis and antithesis in their new forms \textit{can} be true.”\textsuperscript{21} The First Antinomy in the first \textit{Critique}, which asserts both that the world is \textit{finite} and that it is \textit{infinite}, is resolved by noting that Thesis and Antithesis contradict each other only on the assumption that the world must have a determinate magnitude. Once one rejects this assumption (which one can do by noting that the assumption holds only for things in themselves, not appearances), one can see that both are false (for the sensible world) insofar as the sensible world is indeterminately large. On the basis of the parallels between the first and third \textit{Critiques}, McLaughlin’s proposal

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  \item \textsuperscript{20} Quarfood, \textit{Transcendental Idealism and the Organism}, likewise accepts the idea that the notion of an intuitive understanding provides argumentative support for understanding the resolution in this way. For he argues that the elimination of time removes the most problematic aspect of the natural purpose, with its suggestion of final causality or reversed time-order (p. 189). However, even if one were to somehow remove temporality from a natural purpose, it is still not clear what implications that would have for \textit{our} understanding. In particular, one should not immediately infer the regulative status of a principle simply because an intuitive understanding might not adopt that principle. Space and time are principles that an intuitive understanding would not have, yet space and time are not regulative principles. Quarfood concludes his treatment of the antinomy with a brief discussion of this problem, but refrains from endorsing any particular solution (pp. 207–8).
  \item \textsuperscript{21} McLaughlin, \textit{Kant’s Critique of Teleology in Biological Explanation}, p. 130.
\end{itemize}
thus holds that Thesis\(_r\) and Antithesis\(_r\) rest on a shared assumption and that, once one identifies and rejects that assumption, one will be able to avoid the contradiction between Thesis\(_r\) and Antithesis\(_r\), just as was the case in the First Antinomy.

McLaughlin then identifies the relevant assumption:

Our understanding has, according to Kant, the peculiarity that it can only explain mechanistically, that it can genuinely understand only that which it can itself produce out of its parts. Due to this peculiarity, we must judge all natural things to be possible according to merely mechanical laws, because it is only such natural objects that we can explain at all. However, apparently due to the same peculiarity, we cannot explain some objects in this manner and have to introduce final (actually formal) causes. We must explain everything mechanistically, but nature need not always let itself be explained in this way. The incompatibility between the two maxims (R1, R2) [i.e., Thesis\(_r\) and Antithesis\(_r\)] is based on the presupposition that the necessity and impossibility are objective. Our subjective inability to explain things otherwise than in a mechanistic manner and our incapacity to explain certain things mechanistically contradict one another only under the presupposition that we must be able to explain everything. If there is a difference between causality and reductionist mechanism, such that causality is constitutive of the objects of experience and mechanism is merely regulative since it is based on a subjective peculiarity of our understanding, then it is at least possible that there may be objects of experience that are not explainable for us.  

If not everything must be objectively explicable, then, McLaughlin claims, both Thesis\(_r\) and Antithesis\(_r\) can be true and the antinomy has been resolved.

However, despite its considerable attractions, this solution is unsatisfying on two main points. Now McLaughlin identifies as the crucial assumption the claim that everything must be objectively explicable. Yet it is difficult to see the relevance of specifically objective considerations to the actual antinomy. Thesis\(_c\) and Antithesis\(_c\) are objective principles, but, as we have seen above, they also do not represent the antinomy. Thesis\(_r\) and Antithesis\(_r\), by contrast, are not constitutive or objective principles, but are rather regulative and subjective (pertaining to how we must judge). It is the contradiction between subjective principles that must be resolved. What is novel about McLaughlin’s position on this issue, however, is his claim that the antimony holds only if everything is explicable for us. For if one rejects that assumption, then Thesis\(_r\) and Antithesis\(_r\) can pertain to different domains, just as rejecting the identification of the sensible and intelligible worlds in the first Critique’s Third Antinomy allows one to hold that, e.g., determinism is true for the sensible world, while freedom is excluded for that class of objects.

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22 McLaughlin, Kant’s Critique of Teleology in Biological Explanation, p. 162.
though not for the intelligible world. Accordingly, on McLaughlin’s interpretation of the resolution, once one rejects the assumption that everything is explicable by us, Thesis, can be true of phenomena that are explicable by us, whereas Antithesis, can be true of phenomena that are not explicable by us.

The problem with this particular aspect of McLaughlin’s interpretation is that although it does resolve the contradiction, it also generates unwelcome results. The main difficulty is that it does not provide any criterion that is independent of mechanical explicability for determining whether phenomena are explicable by us, and thus no criterion that would allow us to apply the regulative principles stated in Thesis, and Antithesis,. That is, for any given phenomenon we would have no criterion that would determine whether it is explicable by us and thus no way of knowing whether we should judge the phenomenon as possible according to mechanical laws alone or not. Notice how very different such a resolution would be from how the first Critique’s Antinomy is resolved. For its distinction between the sensible and intelligible world provides us with an explicit criterion for distinguishing between the things of which the thesis and antithesis will be true or false. By contrast, the distinction between what can and cannot be explicable by us provides no criterion for applying the regulative principles that constitute the antinomy, leaving us unable to avoid a contradiction when confronted with a given phenomenon (even if there is, strictly speaking, no contradiction in the phenomenon).

McLaughlin’s interpretation also faces some difficulty in accounting for the practical import of Kant’s resolution. For Kant holds that we should try to explain any given phenomenon as far as we can according to mechanical laws. However, if the antinomy is resolved as McLaughlin proposes, it is not clear why this recommendation would apply. For if a phenomenon is not explicable by us, then McLaughlin’s interpretation of Antithesis, would have it that we should judge that it is not possible according to mechanical laws. However, if we should judge that it is not possible according to mechanical laws, it is difficult to see why we should try to explain it as possible according to mechanical laws as far as we can (given that we do not think that such an explanation is even possible.) As a result, Kant would not be justified in making such a recommendation if McLaughlin’s interpretation were correct.

7.3.4 Subordination

Ginsborg suggests yet a different resolution to the antinomy. Instead of denying that we are able to explain organisms, she argues that Kant must
show how Thesis_r and Antithesis_r “can be reconciled from the point of view of a discursive understanding applying these principles within the context of scientific enquiry, . . . [a] step, which . . . invokes the ‘subordination’ of mechanism to teleology.”

Ginsborg’s focus on the application of principles within scientific inquiry is important, but it also raises the question of how this subordination should be understood. Ginsborg spells this out by suggesting that when scientists attempt to explain the origin of organisms, they do so on the basis not of inanimate matter, as would be the case for, say, collisions of billiard balls, but rather of matter that is already organized in such a way that it is endowed with the kind of formative power that makes it possible for an organism to maintain itself and reproduce in ways that watches cannot. Ginsborg develops her interpretation further as follows:

In effect, then, [Kant] completes the resolution of the antinomy by allowing two different, although related, senses of mechanical explanation. On the narrower sense, on which the mechanical explanation of a thing involves accounting for its existence in terms of the fundamental powers of inorganic matter, organisms are indeed . . . inexplicable by us. But they can still be mechanically explained in a weaker sense which does not exclude teleology, namely in terms of the powers of organized matter.

So Ginsborg’s idea is that when we attempt to explain organisms, while mechanical laws are still invoked, they are not applied exclusively to inorganic matter. Ginsborg’s interpretation has a clear advantage here in that it can find textual support in several sentences at 5:414 and 5:415 in §78, where Kant asserts the subordination of mechanical explanations to teleological explanations, as well as in several passages from §§80–1, where he provides examples of how we are to explain natural ends by considering what changes would occur to an organism if certain mechanical adjustments were made to it.

Though Ginsborg is right to note the importance of Kant’s idea that mechanism is in some sense subordinate to teleology in Kant’s resolution of the antinomy, her interpretation still faces two significant challenges. First, Ginsborg does not explain how the contradiction between Thesis_r and Antithesis_r is to be resolved. The mere fact that teleological explanations must involve mechanical laws may well

24 In a series of further articles, which are collected in The Normativity of Nature, Ginsborg has argued that a special kind of normativity is involved in such judgments.
25 Ginsborg, “Kant’s Biological Teleology and Its Philosophical Significance,” 325.
constrain how the resolution is to be achieved, but it cannot represent the
resolution itself insofar as it does not explain whether and how Thesisr
and Antithesisr are, e.g., both false. While one might think that subordin-
atating mechanical to teleological explanation would require a restriction
in the scope of Thesisr, in §80 Kant states quite clearly that Thesisr
remains true: “The authorization to seek for a merely mechanical
explanation of all natural products is in itself entirely unrestricted”
(5:417), even though he then immediately notes that our ability to
identify merely mechanical explanations is severely limited. In fact, Kant
claims that this limitation even explains why mechanical explanation is
subordinate to teleological principles. So it is clear that the notion of
subordination that Ginsborg rightly draws our attention to is multi-
faceted, and its implications for the resolution of the antinomy are not
immediately obvious.

Second, Ginsborg’s interpretation does not take into account one
feature that Kant seems to insist on as crucial to explaining his resolution
of the antinomy. In §78, for example, he writes:

The two principles [of mechanism and teleology] cannot be united in one and the
same thing in nature as fundamental principles for the explanation (deduction) of
one from the other . . . For one kind of explanation excludes the other, even on
the supposition that objectively both grounds of the possibility rest on a single
one, but one of which we take no account. The principle that is to make possible
the unifiability of both in the judging of nature in accordance with them must be
placed in what lies outside of both (hence outside of the possible empirical
representation of nature), but which still contains the ground of both, i.e., in
the supersensible, and each of these two kinds of explanation must be related
to that. (5:411–12)

What is crucial here is not just that Kant invokes the supersensible, but
the use to which he puts it. The unifiability of mechanical and teleo-
logical principles depends on the supersensible, since the supersensible is
the ground of both. More specifically, in his explanation of the claim just
quoted, Kant asserts that the principle that underlies both mechanism
and teleology “justifies the maxims of natural research that jointly
depend on it” (5:412). Kant thus seems to think not only that both
Thesisr and Antithesisr depend on a supersensible principle but also that
the way to see how these otherwise incompatible principles can be
rendered compatible is by seeing that they both depend on such a
principle.26 Such claims obviously stand in need of considerable explana-
tion and justification. However, rather than attempting to explain and
justify them, Kant immediately goes on to assert that “we cannot form

26 Section 7.2.2 suggests this point too.
the least affirmative determinate concept of this” and that therefore how these incompatible principles can be rendered compatible “can by no means be explained” (5:412–13). Instead, Kant suggests that we should pursue the laws of nature – whether mechanical or teleological – “without being troubled by the apparent conflict between the two principles for judging this product; for at least the possibility that both may be objectively unifiable in one principle (since they concern appearances that presuppose a supersensible ground) is secured” (5:413). These claims are deeply puzzling and raise many further questions. However, it is equally clear that Kant views them as playing a crucial role in the resolution of the antinomy. Unfortunately, neither Ginsborg’s interpretation nor any one of the other views discussed above explains these claims or shows how they are to be incorporated into a single comprehensive resolution of the Antinomy of Teleological Judgment.27

7.4 Conclusion

We are now in a position to summarize the most significant results that emerge from considering our two basic questions concerning Kant’s Antinomy of Teleological Judgment. The one major result is that after it became clear that the antinomy consisted in a genuine contradiction between two regulative principles (Thesisr and Antithesisr), we were able to identify a significant problem concerning the requisite proofs of these principles, a problem with two sides: (1) Kant does not provide clear and explicit proofs of either Thesisr or Antithesisr, and (2) no one has made adequate progress in articulating plausible lines of argument on his behalf (though there has been considerable productive debate about the meaning of his claim regarding the mechanical inexplicability of organisms). A second major result is that once the contradiction between Thesisr and Antithesisr was made precise in such a way that it could not be quickly dismissed as resulting from a simple confusion, finding a resolution to the antinomy from within the framework of Kant’s Critical philosophy that would be based on direct textual evidence and be philosophically rigorous proved to be a challenge that remains.28

27 Cohen, “Kant’s Antinomy of Reflective Judgment,” goes further in claiming (pp. 193–4) that the appeal to the supersensible shows that Kant cannot resolve the antinomy. Even though Kant’s claims regarding the supersensible are undoubtedly difficult, I am not (yet) convinced that they necessarily reveal insoluble problems in Kant’s view.

28 For helpful discussion of some of the ideas contained in the first part of this chapter, I thank audience members (especially Eckart Förster, Hannah Ginsborg, and Ina Goy) at a conference in Tübingen in May 2007 on the third Critique. I am indebted to Karl Ameriks, Mark Fisher, Hannah Ginsborg, Peter McLaughlin, and Clinton Tolley for numerous conversations about the antinomy and earlier versions of this chapter.