8 Nature in General as a System of Ends

8.1 Introduction

Despite the many complexities, mysteries, and puzzles that one inevitably encounters reading the “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment,” the basic structure of Kant’s main line of argument would seem to be quite straightforward. What prompts Kant to write about teleological judgment in the first place is organisms, since organisms involve purposes, and purposiveness is a unifying theme of the Critique of the Power of Judgment as a whole (since judgment in general is purposive). Thus Kant begins his discussion of organisms by first providing analyses of what (material, intrinsic, natural) objective purposiveness is and of what an organism is, before asserting that organisms are natural purposes. In this way, his analyses reveal that organisms are different from inorganic matter, which can be explained according to the mechanical principles already laid out in, e.g., the Metaphysical Foundations. But since organisms are in some sense mechanically inexplicable, despite also involving matter, the existence of organisms presents a problem that can be expressed in the form of an antinomy concerning mechanical and teleological modes of explanation. Kant then solves the antinomy by invoking a supersensible ground that (for some reason) allows one to (somehow) privilege teleological over mechanistic explanation, though without thereby rejecting the possible applicability of the latter to organisms. Kant concludes his argument by explaining how this solution fits with his discussion of the physico-theological and moral arguments of the first and second Critiques, thus putting his solution to the antinomy into the larger context of his critical philosophy. In accordance with this three-fold structure of (1) conceptual analysis, (2) antinomial conflict and resolution, and (3) broader context-setting, Kant divides his treatment of organisms in the “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment” into (1) an “Analytic of the Teleological Power of Judgment,” (2) a “Dialectic of the Teleological Power of Judgment,” and (3) a “Methodology of the Teleological Power of Judgment.” In this way,
one has, it seems, an account of Kant’s overall argument that corresponds to the load-bearing elements of this part of the third Critique.

Without denying any of these claims about the structure of the “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment,” I want to assert that such an account omits a crucial element of Kant’s main line of argument. For in a series of passages that have not received sufficient attention, Kant claims that once we start to reflect on organisms, we are necessarily led beyond this initial topic to think of nature in general.¹ That is, even if teleological judgment is prompted by our experience of (what we take to be) organisms, it does not then restrict itself to judgments about organisms, but rather necessarily goes further to make claims about all of nature, which will include at least some things that are not organisms. But this immediately raises two questions: (1) What exactly are Kant’s claims about nature in general (as contrasted with his claims about organisms in particular)? (2) What are his arguments for these claims? I first argue that according to Kant, reflection on organisms necessarily leads to two further claims about nature in general. The first claim is that not just organisms, but in fact every specific thing in nature must also be judged teleologically, while the second is that nature as a whole is a system of purposes that itself has a purpose. I then argue that Kant’s distinctive conception of reason as a faculty that searches for the unconditioned condition of all conditioned objects provides the key for understanding Kant’s arguments for both of these assertions. Although the third Critique does depend in essential ways on the faculty of the power of judgment, the faculty of reason also plays an ineliminable role in its overall argument, since it motivates and justifies Kant’s moving beyond organisms to what is his ultimate concern, namely, the final and unconditioned purpose of nature, which is the existence of human beings, not as natural organisms, but rather as free and rational noumenal agents.²

8.2 Two Claims

In the third paragraph of §67, whose title is “On the Principle of the Teleological Judging of Nature in General as a System of Ends,” Kant argues:

¹ Paul Guyer, Kant’s System of Nature and Freedom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 314–42, esp. p. 327, similarly argues that the step from organisms to nature as a whole is both intrinsically important and crucial to the structure of Kant’s overall argument.

² Though scholars sometimes treat the third Critique as if it had to be about the faculty of judgment exclusively, the book can, I argue, involve reason as well. There is, to my mind, no genuine conflict between the faculty of judgment and reason, even if they have different ends and functions.
It is therefore only matter insofar as it is organized that necessarily carries with it the concept of itself as a natural end, since its specific form is at the same time a product of nature. However, this concept now necessarily leads to the idea of the whole of nature as a system in accordance with the rule of ends, to which idea all of the mechanism of nature in accordance with principles of reason must now be subordinate (at least in order to test natural appearance by this idea). The principle of reason is appropriate for it only subjectively, i.e., as the maxims that everything in the world is good for something, that nothing in it is in vain; and by means of the example that nature gives in its organic products, one is justified, indeed called upon [berufen] to expect nothing in nature and its laws but what is purposive in the whole. (5:378–9)

This passage contains two crucial moves. The first is Kant’s assertion that organized matter is a natural purpose. This assertion, which is obviously central to Kant’s entire argument, is clearly intended as a conclusion that is supposed to follow from his analyses of purposes and organisms in the previous sections (§§61–3 and §§64–6, respectively). The second, which Kant signals (with “now”) as the novel claim that is his focus in this section, is that the notion of an organism “necessarily leads” to the idea of the entirety of nature. But how exactly should this second statement be understood?

Kant seems to have two different claims in mind here. First, he clearly asserts that one is not only justified, but even called on (“berufen”) to expect that everything in nature has a natural purpose or end. Accordingly, not only organisms, the very concept of which entails the concept of a natural purpose, but also inorganic matter must be viewed in terms of the purposes it serves. The force of this claim is thus that the scope of teleological judgment is not limited to organisms, but rather extends universally to each and every thing throughout nature. This is the clear import of his remarks that “everything in the world is good for something” and “nothing in nature is in vain.” I will call this claim the Claim of Universal Scope (CUS).3

Second, Kant seems to think not only that everything in nature has a purpose, but also that nature itself, or nature as a whole, must be a system of purposes. That is, there is a systematic connection between the different purposive things in nature. This point comes out not only in the title to §67, which makes mention of “nature in general as a system of

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3 Kant also states CUS in §66 of the third Critique (5:376). In the first passage in particular, Kant asserts not merely the limited claim that in our judgment “nothing in such a creature [an organism] is in vain” (5:376) (so that he is claiming only that everything in an organism has a purpose), but also “the general doctrine of nature that nothing happens by chance” (5:376), which I take to mean that we judge that nothing in the world at all is in vain, since otherwise there would be no contrast between the first and second claims.
ends” (5:377), but also in his phrase “the idea of a whole of nature as a system” (5:370) as opposed to simply ‘the whole of nature as such.’ Accordingly, though CUS clearly applies to ‘the whole of nature,’ it does not obviously require thinking of all of nature ‘as one system,’ that is, in such a way that the various things in nature are related to each other in any systematic way. This second claim is also on display at the conclusion of the final paragraph of §67, when Kant clarifies that “the unity of the supersensible principle must then be considered as valid in the same way not merely for certain species of natural beings, but for the whole of nature as a system” (5:381). However, Kant wants to go even further than simply claiming that the things in nature come together to form a system. For he also wants to claim both that nature itself is a system of purposes (i.e., the systematic connection of things in nature involves their being purposes) and that nature as a whole must itself have a purpose, just as all of the individual organisms within nature do. Let me label this constellation of positions (that nature as a whole is a system of purposes and that nature as a whole has a purpose) the Claims about Nature as a Whole (CNW).

In the second paragraph of §67 (which immediately precedes the first quotation above and lays the foundation for it), Kant articulates the context for and the meaning of CNW more fully as follows:

To judge a thing to be purposive on account of its internal form is entirely different from holding the existence of such a thing to be an end of nature. For the latter assertion we need not only the concept of a possible end, but also cognition of the final end (scopus) of nature, which requires the relation of nature to something supersensible, which far exceeds all of our teleological cognition of nature; for the end of the existence of nature itself must be sought beyond nature. (5:378)

In this passage, Kant begins by drawing a distinction between judging the natural purpose of a thing according to its form and determining the existence of a thing as a natural purpose. We judge that a thing has the form of a natural purpose when we judge that it is an organism (by displaying the special kind of causality that is definitive of organisms). But to judge the form of a thing as purposive is distinct from passing judgment on the purpose of the existence of that thing. I can judge that this object in front of me is a tree (because its parts and its whole stand in

4 The centrality of Kant’s point is revealed by the fact that he introduces the passage with: “In this section we have meant to say nothing except ...” (5:380).
5 Textual evidence for this claim can be found in §85 at, e.g., 5:437.
a certain reciprocal dependency relation that matter as such does not display) without judging why the tree exists (what ends it might satisfy), or indeed judging that it exists for any purpose at all.

In light of this distinction, Kant then clarifies that once we start thinking about the purpose of the existence of things in nature, we end up being committed to (i) a purpose for the existence of nature as a whole, (ii) the purpose of the existence of nature as a whole being a final purpose or end (Endzweck), and (iii) this final end being something supersensible that lies outside of nature. The first claim amounts to one aspect of CNW as it was originally introduced – nature forms a system of purposes and nature as a whole has a purpose of its own. The second and third claims, by contrast, significantly extend his commitments about the purpose of nature as a whole and thus reveal the full meaning of CNW.

Moreover, Kant’s expression of commitment to all three components of CNW is no fluke; in several passages from later on in the third Critique he expresses the same constellation of claims. Thus in §86 he asserts:

Now if we encounter purposive arrangements in the world, and ... subordinate the ends that are only conditioned to an unconditioned, supreme end, i.e., a final end, then one readily sees, first, that in that case what is at issue is not an end of nature (within it), insofar as it exists, but the end of its existence, with all its arrangements, hence the ultimate end of creation, and in this, further, what is actually at issue is the supreme condition under which alone a final end (i.e., of the determining ground of a highest understanding for the production of the beings of the world) can obtain. (5:443)

And in §88, he reiterates:

But we certainly do find ends in the world, and physical teleology presents them in such measure that ... we will ultimately have reason to assume as the principle for research into nature that there is nothing in nature at all without an end; yet we try in vain to find the final end of nature in nature itself. (5:454)

As a result, Kant understands CNW to involve a robust commitment not only to nature as a system of purposes and to a purpose of nature as a whole, but also to a final purpose that lies outside of nature in the supersensible.7

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6 For the sake of brevity, I am abstracting from the distinction between “ultimate end” (letzter Zweck) and “final end” (Endzweck), helpfully clarified by Guyer (Kant’s System of Nature and Freedom, p. 318).

7 Note that Kant’s commitment here is not to full-fledged cognition, but rather to a weaker kind of assent (though one that has reasons to support it).
8.3 Kant’s Arguments

If Kant thus maintains that reflection on individual organisms “necessarily leads” (5:379) to asserting CUS and CNW, how is one led beyond organisms to these claims, and what arguments does he develop in support of them? Why not be a biologist who is committed to understanding (the functioning of) organisms and leave it at that? Kant’s most explicit statement in regard to CUS is found in §66:

For this concept [of a natural end] leads reason into an order of things entirely different from that of a mere mechanism of nature, which will no longer satisfy us here. An idea has to ground the possibility of the product of nature. However, since this is an absolute unity of the representation, while the matter is a multitude of things, which by itself can provide no determinate unity of composition, if that unity of the idea is even to serve as the determining ground a priori of a natural law of the causality of such a form of the composite, then the end of nature must extend to everything that lies in its product. For once we have related such an effect in the whole to a supersensible determining ground beyond the blind mechanism of nature, we must also judge it entirely in accordance with this principle; and there is no ground for assuming that the form of such a thing is only partially dependent on the latter, for in such a case, in which two heterogeneous principles are jumbled together, no secure rule for judging would remain at all. (5:377)

Kant is making two main points here. First, the discovery of even a single natural purpose (in the form of an organism) leads the faculty of reason, Kant says, and not the faculty of judgment, as one might expect, to “an order of things that is completely different” (5:377) from the mechanistic order laid out in, e.g., the Metaphysical Foundations. For in a natural purpose, everything is both cause and effect of itself (5:370) such that the whole depends on its parts at the same time that the parts depend on the whole, a distinctive causal ordering that is evident, Kant thinks, in the maintenance and growth of an organism as well as in the preservation of the species through reproduction. It is because of this special kind of reciprocal dependence that Kant speaks in this passage of a unity that matter, which essentially involves a plurality (but not a principle that necessarily unifies the plurality), does not have. Given the analyses of the previous §§62–5, this point is not fundamentally new, even if it does stress the importance of the distinctive kind of order and unity found in organisms.

8 Again, though there is no conflict between reason and the faculty of judgment, in this case the distinctive features of reason make it more appropriate for Kant to refer to it explicitly.
Second, and more importantly, Kant suggests that if we posit a supersensible ground outside of nature as responsible for the distinctive order and purpose found in an organism, then we are committed to viewing everything in that organism as ordered in that same kind of way. However, if the appeal to a supersensible ground requires the application of a single criterion in order to explain a given object (including its constituent parts and structure), then one can reconstruct an argument for CUS based on CNW by noting that CNW requires that the object we hope to explain is simply the world in its entirety. Specifically, once one has claimed that nature as a whole forms a system of purposes and posited a supersensible ground to account for the final purpose of nature as a whole (as CNW maintains), it follows that one must consider all specific things in nature with respect to what purpose they have, because we consider them to be essential members of the system of purposes of nature that is brought about by this supersensible ground. But investigating whether each and every thing has a purpose is simply tantamount to CUS. So it is plausible to think that CUS follows straightforwardly from CNW.9

However, Kant does suggest a line of thought in support of CUS that runs independently of CNW, at least to a certain extent. At the end of the quotation, he notes that if one attempted to explain the form of a thing as depending in part on its relation to the supersensible principle invoked in CNW and in part on something else, then we would have two heterogeneous principles that worked independently of each other, which would entail that we would have “no secure rule” (5:377) for judging what makes such a form possible. That is, such a scenario would require that one judge some features of an object in nature according to mechanistic principles and other features according to teleological principles, which would be confusing since one would have no criterion to determine which principle should be used to explain any given feature. At the same time, it is not clear that Kant intends for it to be an argument that carries much independent weight. For it is not obvious (at least not without

9 I should note that Kant does not explicitly formulate this argument. His explicit argument is only that the appeal to a supersensible ground requires the application of a single criterion to an organism. I am proposing that this argument be extended to the world as a whole, however, because it seems to be the most promising way to justify CUS. I do not rule out the possibility that there are other ways of justifying CUS. (Perhaps one might argue that CUS follows simply from nature having an end, and then nature forming a system of purposes follows from CUS plus some other assumptions.) What the textual justification for such arguments might be cannot easily be anticipated. The interpretation presented above is at least based on the text, even if it requires extending the argument’s scope so as to encompass the world in its entirety (which, given CNW, Kant is committed to).
more explicit argument than Kant provides here) why it is necessary that we must have only one criterion for judging the different features of things. There are all sorts of cases in which we use multiple criteria in a given explanatory context, even if there is a hierarchy among them. Granted, it is useful to have a single criterion for all cases, and also convenient, but its necessity is not particularly perspicuous. Fortunately, CUS follows from CNW, so this result is not damaging to Kant’s position.

In the very next paragraph, Kant clarifies that the conclusion of his argument is still consistent with the possibility that some of the things in nature might not themselves have purposes, but rather are explicable according to purely mechanical laws. For example, CUS does not entail that everything in nature is itself an organism, which is important given that water, for example, clearly is not an organism. Nor does it even necessarily imply that everything in nature must serve as a purpose for something else. Water serves as a purpose for the existence of other organisms in nature insofar as it is necessary for the sustenance of plants and animals, but it is not metaphysically impossible that things serving no purpose might exist, such as, e.g., small bits of matter in a distant galaxy that have no effect on us or on any other rational living being. Neither the fact that a whole has a purpose (or is viewed as having a purpose) nor the fact that there is a system of purposes within nature as a whole immediately entails that absolutely everything within nature must actually have a purpose (or must be viewed as having a purpose). In short, the system of natural purposes need not be completely coextensive with all of the objects in nature. Instead, the demand is that one consider whether all things in nature have either intrinsic or extrinsic purposes. CUS is, in short, no more than a regulative principle, and its truth depends, as we have seen, on the truth of CNW, just as Kant claims.

So what is Kant’s argument for CNW? The passage that comes closest to containing an explicit argument for CNW can be found in the latter half of the second paragraph of §67 (the first half of which was quoted earlier). After claiming that the purpose of the existence of nature must be sought beyond nature, Kant provides the following by way of justification:

The internal form of a mere blade of grass can demonstrate its merely possible origin in accordance with the rule of ends in a way that is sufficient for our human

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10 I understand regulative principles in this case in such a way that what they presuppose is not that the relevant feature that is governed by the content of the principle is metaphysically possible, but rather that it might be metaphysically possible (or is metaphysically possible for all we know).
faculty of judging. But if one leaves this aside and looks only to the use that other natural beings make of it, then one abandons the contemplation of its internal organization and looks only at its external purposive relations, where the grass is necessary to the livestock, just as the latter is necessary to the human being as the means for his existence; yet one does not see why it is necessary that human beings exist (a question which, if one thinks about the New Hollanders or the Fuegians, might not be so easy to answer); thus one does not arrive at any categorical end, but all of this purposive relation rests on a condition that is always to be found further on, and which, as unconditioned, (the existence of a thing as a final end) lies entirely outside of the physical-teleological way of considering the world. But then such a thing is also not a natural end; for it (or its entire species) is not to be regarded as a natural product. (5:378)

Kant’s argument contains racist views that are highly objectionable. He also seems to argue that once one distinguishes between the inner form of natural purposes in organisms and the purpose of the existence of things and then looks beyond the former, one will see that it is not possible to explain the purpose of the existence of things by way of external purposive relations within nature. Even if the existence of grass is necessary for the existence of cattle and the existence of cattle is in turn necessary for the existence of human beings, it is not necessary that human beings exist. Indeed, there are, Kant maintains, no necessarily existing things within nature. So if one searches for the purpose of the existence of things, external purposive relations within nature cannot suffice. Instead, the only thing that could possibly suffice to explain the purpose of the existence of things is, Kant wants to argue, an unconditioned final end that lies outside of nature. But Kant’s argument raises two questions: (1) What is it that moves one to seek a sufficient explanation of the purpose of the existence of things? (2) Why must a sufficient explanation take recourse specifically to an unconditioned final end that lies outside of nature?

I want to suggest that the answer to both of these questions derives from Kant’s distinctive conception of reason. For current purposes, Kant’s conception of reason can be summarized in three claims. First, reason is a faculty that searches for the conditions for whatever is

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11 By distinguishing between these two cases Kant is in effect operating with two different instances of purpose, one pertaining to the properties of a thing, the other concerning the existence of the thing. While one might think that Kant is thus illegitimately sliding from the one notion to the other, one might think that both are instances of conditioning relations and thus both are equally of interest to reason.

12 That is, in effect, the second question asks: Why is CNW true?

13 Both Guyer (Kant’s System of Nature and Freedom) and Angela Breitenbach, Die Analogie von Vernunft und Natur. Eine Umweltphilosophie nach Kant (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), suggest that reason is important in drawing this inference due to its desire for unification. I am arguing that one can take this point further by showing that it is not just
conditioned that is given. For example, in syllogistic logic (as Kant understands it), reason searches for the conditions for a conditioned judgment, since if successful, it can then formulate a syllogism, with the premises serving as the conditions for the conclusion, which is ‘conditioned’ by its premises. However, reason is not restricted to judgment and the realm of logic, but rather applies to any object of experience; for any conditioned object that is given to us, reason necessarily searches for the conditions that would explain it, such as when reason searches for the cause of some change of state that we experience. Reason is thus the faculty that is interested in identifying the conditions for anything that is conditioned.

Second, reason searches not simply for conditions but also for the totality of conditions and thus the unconditioned. There is obviously an analytic connection between anything that is conditioned and its conditions, because to characterize something as conditioned entails conditions on that thing. However, reason’s interest in the unconditioned, which alone offers it a satisfactory resting place (since if it obtained the object of its inquiry, it would have nothing else to pursue), goes beyond this analytic connection and can be satisfied only by seeking the totality of conditions. For the totality of conditions cannot be a totality if it does not contain all conditions, but if it contains all conditions, then it must be unconditioned, because if this totality were itself conditioned, it would not have included the condition that conditions it and would thus not in fact be the totality of conditions. As a result, if reason could find all of the conditions for something conditioned, it would necessarily have found the unconditioned as well. Moreover, because reason seeks the totality of conditions for what is conditioned by starting with something conditioned and moving to its conditions, which, because they are themselves conditioned, leads reason to yet further conditions, etc. until it reaches the unconditioned, the unconditioned also provides a principle of organization, Kant thinks, for all the conditions that fall under it. In this way, it leads to a systematic interconnection of conditioned elements under a single unconditioned principle. That is, the unconditioned serves as the principle for the system of condition–conditioned relations that reason discovers in its search for the totality of conditions.

Third, Kant holds that the unconditioned object that alone could provide reason with a satisfying resting place can never be given to us through the senses and thus can never be an object that we could cognize in nature.\textsuperscript{14} Since the objects of traditional metaphysics that interest us most, such as God, freedom, and the soul, are characterized as unconditioned, it follows that we cannot have immediate cognition of them through the senses.\textsuperscript{15} At the same time, since reason does not, on that account, lose its interest in the unconditioned, our ideas of this kind of object function as regulative principles that guide our understanding’s judgments such that we strive to come ever closer to approximating these ideals. So, even though reason does not find satisfaction in cognition of the unconditioned, it still functions as a regulative principle that unifies its subject matter in a distinctive and systematic way. In this way, it finds as much satisfaction as is possible for a faculty that is limited by the fact that objects must be given to it through sensible intuition.

This account of Kant’s conception of reason puts us in a position to understand his argument for CNW. First, as we saw above, Kant identifies reason as the faculty that leads us to move beyond the purely mechanistic order of inert matter to the distinctive order of organisms. Specifically, the experience of organisms reveals a special kind of conditioning relationship, where both the whole and its parts reciprocally condition each other according to some unified principle. It is precisely because a distinctive kind of conditioning relationship is involved in organisms that reason is the faculty that moves us beyond mechanisms to this new order. Moreover, it does so in several ways. On the one hand, reason, with its desire for conditions, is interested in the internal form of organisms, since this form involves a distinctive unity with complex conditioning relations. Yet reason also discovers that organisms, like all other objects in nature, can be conditioned by external circumstances. For example, plants require sunlight, water, and nutrients from the soil in order to grow, maintain, and reproduce themselves.\textsuperscript{16} In this way reason is able to discover vibrant ecosystems as well as understand how they might be endangered. In short, the internal form of organisms involves

\textsuperscript{14} There are passages to this effect scattered throughout Kant’s corpus. There are not, however, clearly stated arguments that would justify this claim.

\textsuperscript{15} This claim coincides perfectly with transcendental idealism’s claim that we cannot have cognition of things in themselves, such as God, freedom, and the soul. However, Kant’s reasons in this case, whatever they are, turn out to be quite different.

external conditions that reason must seek out. On the other hand, and more importantly for present purposes, reason is also compelled to search for the purpose and thus the condition of the existence of organisms. In this case, it is an external or relative purposiveness that is pivotal. When reason seeks the purpose for the existence of one thing (organism A) and finds that it cannot lie in that thing, it seeks its purpose in another thing in nature (e.g., organism B). Thus, plants exist for animals, which exist in turn for humans, etc. The purpose of the existence of things, since it contains a conditioning relation, is of fundamental interest to reason as well. So, just as Kant suggests in several places, it is reason that leads us to consider the special status of organisms, both in their internal form and with respect to purposive relations that condition their existence.

Second, CNW specifically asserts further that nature as a whole must itself have a purpose and that it must, moreover, be a final and unconditioned purpose. Why this demand and why in this specific form? If reason’s ultimate interest is with the unconditioned, it is clear that though reason begins by seeking the purpose, or condition, for the existence of one finite thing in another, it continues to seek ever further conditions such that it ultimately ends up inquiring into the purpose for the existence of nature as a whole. And it is clear that the purpose of the existence of nature as a whole must be a final purpose, one not conditioned by anything else; i.e., it must be unconditioned. Put more informally, the purpose of nature as a whole cannot be something that exists for the sake of something else, but is rather something that exists for its own sake. Kant’s repeated references to a “final end” (5:378), a “condition that is always to be found further on, and which, as unconditioned, . . . lies entirely outside of the physical-teleological way of considering the world” (5:378), are clear expressions of the structure of reason’s interest in finding the unconditioned. Thus, Kant’s understanding of reason reveals why it claims that nature as a whole must have a purpose that is both a final and an unconditioned purpose.

Moreover, taking these two points together, we can see why nature as a whole must also be regarded as a system of purposes. As the first point

17 Indeed, because organisms involve both internal and external conditions, reason’s search for conditions provides a direct justification of CUS.
18 In a later passage, Kant adds that in this way, one can discover “many laws of nature which, given the limitation of our insights into the inner mechanisms of nature, would otherwise remain hidden from us” (5:398).
19 There are significant similarities between this account of why nature as a whole involves the notion of an unconditioned purpose and Kant’s explanation of the ideas of reason in “On the Transcendental Ideas” in the first Critique (A321/B377).
20 Another relevant passage can be found at 5:436: “Physicotheology is the attempt of reason to infer from the ends of nature (which can be cognized only empirically) to the supreme cause of nature and its properties.”
shows, reason seeks the conditioning relations between the purposes of things that exist in nature, but that alone would not require a unifying principle that would organize these purposes into a single system. (Perhaps some ecosystems are completely distinct from others or perhaps things are more like an aggregate than a system.) As the second point shows, however, in seeking the totality of conditions for something conditioned, seeks something unconditioned that subordinates to itself everything that it conditions. The final, unconditioned purpose it seeks subordinates (or conditions) the purposes of the things that exist in nature in such a way that they form a system in Kant’s specific sense of the term.\textsuperscript{21} That is, it is only because of the unconditioned purpose of nature that nature as a whole must also form a system of purposes and not a mere aggregate.

Third, not only is the final end of nature unconditioned, for Kant, but it also lies beyond the limits of our cognition, in the supersensible. Why? (In particular, why is the supersensible introduced?) Given that we cannot experience anything unconditioned and given that the final purpose of nature is unconditioned, it follows immediately that we cannot have experience of the final purpose of nature. Indeed, Kant explicitly asserts that nature as a whole is not given to us as organized (5:398). At the same time, because reason does not lose interest in the unconditioned simply because it cannot cognize it, it posits the unconditioned as something that lies beyond what we can experience, that is, beyond the sensible world, and thus in the supersensible. As a result, it functions not as an object in nature that we could cognize as such, but rather as a regulative ideal that we use to organize what we do experience into a systematic whole. In this way, an appreciation of Kant’s conception of reason allows one to understand what his justification is for both CNW and CUS.

\section*{8.4 Conclusion}

One might naturally start reading the “Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment” with the expectation that Kant will (simply) try to explain the distinctive status of living organisms. As philosophers of biology will attest, providing such an explanation is no mean feat, and if Kant has accomplished such a significant task, we should be glad. However, what

\textsuperscript{21} Though Kant’s position here may (or may not) be plausible, he would need an additional argument to show that everything in nature must be related as a single system of purposes. For, at least prima facie, one could imagine several causal chains that were all subordinate to a single unconditioned condition, but that were nonetheless distinct from each other. For example, perhaps there could be a plurality of ecosystems that are each conditioned by some further purpose, yet completely separate from each other.

\url{https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms}.
\url{https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316683026.010}
we have come to see is that reason, on Kant’s distinctive understanding of that faculty, leads us to expectations that have an even grander scope and even more fundamental ambitions. For reason, as the faculty that searches for any and all conditions until it finds the unconditioned, has legitimate interests not only in the inner form of organisms, but also in the external conditions on these organisms and in the purpose for the existence of objects in nature. However, given its essential interest in the unconditioned, reason does not stop there. It also seeks systematic connections within nature as well as a final unconditioned purpose for nature as a whole that must itself lie outside of nature. It is at this point that Kant’s grandest ambition becomes apparent. For this question is simply the question of why the world (along with everything in it) exists at all. And in line with the fundamental results of his moral philosophy, his answer is that a human being, or any being that has the supersensible ability to act freely and thus morally, can be both unconditioned and yet still necessary in itself, that is, man considered not as an organism within nature, but rather as a noumenon (5:435). For a free, rational, and spontaneous being is the only kind of entity of which one cannot ask why it exists, given that it is the kind of entity that could be “a final end to which the whole of nature must be subordinated” (5:436). Identifying human beings as the final end of creation has implications, in turn, for the kind of systematic relations that obtain within the members of the system of ends in nature, such as for the kinds of laws that obtain, because they must, as Kant argues in the second Critique, make possible the highest good that rational agents presuppose is possible in acting morally. In this way, we see how Kant unifies major elements of his entire critical project, while addressing one of the most basic questions that we can raise about our existence.

23 It is at this point that reason, which had been theoretical in investigating the conditioning relations that obtain between organisms, becomes practical as well.
26 I thank Karl Ameriks, Hannah Ginsborg, Ina Goy, Paul Guyer, Peter McLaughlin, James Messina, Günter Zöller and all of the participants at the “International Symposium: Kant’s Theory of Biology” held in Tübingen in December 2010, for helpful discussion of an earlier version of this chapter.