

KANT, SPINOZA, AND THE REGULATIVE ROLE OF THE THEOLOGICAL IDEA IN THE *CRITIQUE OF JUDGMENT*

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Abstract

Spinoza's views on theology and teleology are infamous in their ability to draw commentators throughout the ages into acrimonious exchanges. The late 18th century German *Aufklärung* was perhaps one of the more volatile environments to debate these issues relating to Spinoza. Nestled between these two concepts is Spinoza's account of intuition. He claimed that intuitive knowledge – which represents the capacity to immediately grasp the essences of things – is not only possible for human cognition, but that it also renders a truer understanding of God, and hence, we see that nature that has no final purposes. When Kant broached the issue of Spinozism in his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), he claimed that the problem of theology and teleology posed by Spinoza could be overcome. In this paper I argue that Kant's confrontation with Spinoza frames the context of his presentation of intuitive understanding in the third *Critique*. The differences between Kant's conception of the intuitive understanding and Spinoza's idea of an intuitive intellect concern two key elements: (1) For Kant, the intuitive understanding is impossible for human beings and (2) according to Kant, we can attribute this intuitive knowledge to God only for regulative purposes. For Kant, reason thinks the idea of an understanding unlike our own – one that intuits – in order to have a basis for conceiving of teleological purposes in nature. The only way we can make sense of the contingency we find in nature, in which the purposes of objects of nature underwrite the cause of things, is to think of an understanding that would intuit nature in an actual way. I claim that Kant's confrontation with Spinoza sheds light on the *Critique of Judgment* as a whole.

It was Spinoza who posed the greatest challenge to the German *Aufklärung* of the late 18th century. Some thinkers held that Spinoza's views were moribund, while others thought that Spinoza posed a real threat to both religion and reason. Spinoza claimed that humans have the potential for divine intuition, that is, the capacity of the mind to grasp the essences of immediately given things. When Kant broached the issue of Spinozism in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), he made

a critical distinction between his transcendental philosophy and Spinozism for several reasons, not the least of which concerns the problem of intuitive knowledge. I will argue that this problem pivots around two differences between Kant and Spinoza. Kant claims, first, that intuitive understanding is impossible for human understanding and second, that we nevertheless can, and must, attribute this intuitive knowledge to God for regulative purposes. According to Kant, if intuitive understanding were at all possible for finite cognition – i.e., if we had the capacity to understand things in themselves – this would obliterate the boundary between the finite and the infinite understanding. I aim to show that their diverging views on the concept of intuition offer a basis from which we can throw light on the aim of the third *Critique*. Kant's confrontation with Spinoza, in my view, frames the context of Kant's presentation of the regulative ideas of reason in the third *Critique*.

Coming to grips with Kant's confrontation with Spinozism is not without forking paths along the way. Many commentators on Kant's theory of intuitive understanding in the third *Critique* leave aside his criticism of Spinoza,¹ or they rely exclusively on the accounts of post-Kantian thinkers such as Hegel,² while yet others have erroneously suggested that Kant subverts his critical stance by drawing near to Spinozism.³ None of these accounts provide a systematic reconstruction

¹ Cf. Philonenko, Alexis, "L'antinomie du jugement téléologique chez Kant", *Revue du Métaphysique et de Moral*, 82 (1), 1977, pp. 13–37; McLaughlin, Peter, *Kants Kritik der teleologischen Urteils kraft*, Bonn, Bouvier Verlag, 1989; and Allison, Henry E., "Reply to the Comments of Longuenesse and Gingsborg" *Inquiry*, 46 (2), 2003, pp. 182–194.

² Cf. Gram, Moltke, "Intellectual Intuition: The Continuity Thesis", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52, 1981, pp. 287–304; Verra, Valerio, "Immaginazione Transcendentale e Intelletto Intuitivo", in Valerio Verra (ed.), *Hegel Interprete di Kant*, Napoli, Prismis, 1981, pp. 67–89; Bell, David, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe*, London, University of London Institute of Germanic Studies, 1984; Düsing, Klaus, "Ästhetische Einbildungskraft und intuitiver Verstand. Kants Lehre und Hegels spekulativ idealistische Umdeutung", *Hegel Studien*, 21, 1986, pp. 87–128; Westphal, Kenneth R., "Kant, Hegel, and the Fate of 'the' Intuitive Intellect", in Sally Sedgwick (ed.), *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy: Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000; Förster, Eckart, "Die Bedeutung von §§ 76–77 der *Kritik der Urteils kraft* für die Entwicklung der nachkantischen Philosophie I", *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, 56, 2002, pp. 169–190; Nuzzo, Angelica, "Kritik der Urteils kraft §§ 76–77: Reflective Judgment and the Limits of Transcendental Philosophy", *Kant Yearbook*, 1, 2009, pp. 143–72; Mensch, Jennifer, "Intuition and Nature in Kant and Goethe", *European Journal of Philosophy*, 19 (3), 2011, pp. 431–53; Förster, Eckart, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy. A Systematic Reconstruction*, trans. Brady Bowman, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2012. I am not suggesting that any of these accounts are necessarily wrong, but rather, I think that Kant's thesis in §§ 76–77, i.e., how he responded to Spinoza, has been subordinated to understand how these sections were vital to the development of early 19th century German philosophy.

³ Cf. Zammito, John, *The Genesis of Kant's Critique of Judgment*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1992, p. 252; and Toscano, Alberto, *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation Between Kant and Deleuze*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. Lord argues against Zammito, but she

of Kant's inherent reactions against Spinoza in view of the problem of intuitive understanding.⁴

Before turning to his criticism of the notion of purposiveness, I will briefly consider Spinoza's epistemology. I show that his anti-teleological account of nature receives a systematic criticism on behalf of Kant in his presentation of the antinomy of judgment concerning mechanism and teleology. I here aim to connect the principle used by reflective judgment with the regulative role of reason.⁵ I turn to the Kantian idea of intuitive understanding to show how Kant resolves that antinomy. I conclude by arguing for the central role played by Spinozism in the third *Critique* at large.

1. Spinozism, Intuitive Knowledge, and the Critique of Natural Purposes

There are two elements of Spinoza's thought that need to be discussed in order to make my point about Kant's *Auseinandersetzung* with Spinoza: first, the idea of intuitive understanding and; second, the concept of natural purposes.

concludes that if we consider Spinoza apart from the 18th century interpretation of Spinozism, then Kant and Spinoza are not so very different (cf. Lord, Beth, *Kant and Spinozism: Transcendental Idealism and Immanence from Jacobi to Deleuze*, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). I disagree with Lord on this point. Wiehl, by contrast, correctly states that the problem that faces both Kant and Spinoza concerns teleology and theology, but he never connects this to the problem of intuitive understanding (cf. Wiehl, Reiner, "Sackgasse oder Weg? Zur Auseinandersetzung Kants mit Spinoza", in Manfred Walther (ed.), *Spinoza und der Deutsche Idealismus*, Königshausen & Neumann, pp. 15–41).

⁴ There are a few exceptions that argue that Kant's criticism of Spinoza is integral to the aim of the third *Critique*. Cf. Zammito, 1992; Allison, Henry E, "Kant's Critique of Spinoza", in Genevieve Lloyd (ed.), *Spinoza: Critical Assessments*, Vol. IV, London: Routledge, 2001, pp. 188–212; and Lord, Beth, "Against the Fanaticism of Forces: Kant's Critique of Herder's Spinozism", *Parallax*, 5 (2), 2009, pp. 53–68. However, I do not think that any of these accounts adequately addresses the issue of intuitive understanding.

⁵ There are two diverging views on this issue. Makkreel has argued that aesthetic judgments are not regulative at all, but constitutive, hence he claims that "'reflective' and 'regulative' are not synonymous", while teleological judgments are both regulative and reflective (cf. Makkreel, Rudolf, "Regulative and Reflective Uses of Purposiveness", *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 30 (1), 1992, p. 50). Goldman, by contrast, argues that Makkreel draws too tight of a line, for the term *regulative* could be understood in a more narrower sense, while *reflective* denotes a broader usage by Kant (cf. Goldman, Avery, *Kant and the Subject of Critique: On the Regulative Role of the Psychological Idea*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012, 198–99n33). The two fundamental questions that guide the third *Critique* are: (1) does judgment have an a priori principle? (2) are the a priori principles of judgment constitutive or regulative? (5:168). I argue throughout this paper that reflective judgment relies on a regulative principle.

Spinoza distinguishes three kinds of knowledge: imagination, reason, and intuitive knowledge, which all take on a different view the concept of purposes. Seen from the perspective of the imagination, he argues, we will always regard nature as contingent. If I meet Peter in the morning, Paul in the afternoon, and Simon in the evening, my imagination will condition the image of each person according to the time of day, as imagination always resorts to some kind of *doxa*.⁶ In order to become rational, we must understand the cause of that which affects the body and form an adequate idea of these affects.⁷ To become rational means to regard all things “as they are in themselves”.⁸ For Spinoza, the point is to activate one’s rational power and thus become aware of the eternal necessity of God. Understanding all things, including oneself, as an effect of the cause of God releases us from being negatively affected by external forces and further opens the way towards intuitive knowledge.

Spinoza defines intuitive knowledge as something that “proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [formal] essence of things.”⁹ Rational insight gives us universal knowledge of things in general, for we see that all things depend on the essence of God, whereas intuitive knowledge achieves essential knowledge of particular things.¹⁰ Like reason, intuitive knowledge recognizes the eternity of God’s essence, but it gives us an even greater satisfaction because we take delight in understanding the singular essences of things.¹¹ It could be said that intuitive knowledge yields a kind of religiosity, but one that does assent to the kind of dogmatism that, according to Spinoza, are endemic to religions. Intuitive knowledge enhances the reach of reason by expressing the particular essences of things through the

⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, IIP44s. Spinoza, Baruch, *Ethics*, in Edwin M. Curley (trans.), *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985. All references to Spinoza are from the *Ethics* (*E*), which are cited by the following abbreviations: app = Appendix; c = corollary; d = demonstration; D = Definition; P = Proposition; s = scholia.

⁷ Cf. *E* IIP40s2II. Deleuze has argued that the common notions provide the link between the first and second kinds of knowledge (cf. Deleuze, Gilles, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, New York, Zone Books, 1990, pp. 279–80). As he sees it, true knowledge originates in the “common notions” that adequately express the idea of things (also cf. *E* IIIP39). This claim by Deleuze, however, requires a qualification: common notions lead one to reason, but they do not lead to intuitive knowledge. As Macherey has argued, the transition from imagination to reason is the soul’s movement from mere external determinations to determining things from the interiority of the soul (cf. Macherey, Pierre, *Introduction à l’Ethique de Spinoza: La deuxième partie, La réalité mentale*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, p. 276).

⁸ *E* IIP44d.

⁹ *E* II40sIV.

¹⁰ *E* VP36s.

¹¹ *E* VP24; VP27; VP31.

interiority of the soul, as if intuitive knowledge opens the way for attaining secular salvation.¹² It releases us from deluding ourselves with notions that things are endowed with purposes.

Spinoza writes that there are two main illusions that prey upon the imagination: one comes from believing in freedom simply by being conscious; the other stems from the belief that things serve a purpose for us.¹³ On Spinoza's view, this means that when we are unable to find some common sense answer for the cause of something, we infer that it must exist because God wills it to exist. When people ask "Why always me?" they presuppose some existing teleological plan that God has made for them.¹⁴ We become negatively determined by external forces and fail to understand the causes. Therefore, we create the illusion of ends as a prescriptive therapy to explain why we succumb to passions. Delusional men, Spinoza writes,

¹² The distinction between the second and third kinds of knowledge has been much debated by commentators. Gueroult has correctly pointed out that the effort to know by the third kind of knowledge arises from reason (cf. Gueroult, Martial, *Spinoza II: L'Âme (Ethique, II)*, New York, Georg Olms Verlag Hildesheim, 1974, pp. 470–71). However, some commentators have argued that Spinoza's articulation of the intuitive knowledge is simply incomprehensible (cf. Bennett, Jonathan F., *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1984; and Alquié, Ferdinand, *Le rationalisme de Spinoza*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003). Some commentators have argued that intuitive knowledge is deductive, as it requires one to proceed from one kind of adequate knowledge to another (cf. Hubbeling, H. G., *Spinoza's Methodology*, Groningen, Van Gorcum & Comp. N.V., 1964, p. 14), that it requires inferential knowledge (cf. Parkinson, G. H. R., *Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954, p. 183), or that it is both inferential and requires direct knowledge of particular things (cf. Carr, Spencer, "Spinoza's Distinction Between Rational and Intuitive Knowledge", *The Philosophical Review*, 87 (2), 1978 p. 245). Others have more accurately argued, in my view, that simple deduction is not enough. What is required is a demonstrative application of rational knowledge in which our personhood is transformed into understanding things in their true essence. In this way, intuitive knowledge differs both in method and content (cf. De Dijn, Herman, "Wisdom and Theoretical Knowledge in Spinoza", in Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau (eds.), *Spinoza: Issues and Directions. The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*. Leiden, Brill, 1990, pp. 147–156; Yovel, Yirmiyahu (1990), "The Third Kind of Knowledge as Alternative Salvation", in Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau (eds.), *Spinoza: Issues and Directions. The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*, Leiden, Brill, 1990, pp. 157–175; and Soyarslan, Sanem, "The Distinction Between Reason and Intuitive Knowledge in Spinoza's *Ethics*", *European Journal of Philosophy*, 2013). It suffices for my aim to simply state that intuitive knowledge, whatever the scope of it may be according to Spinoza, must be possible for human understanding.

¹³ *E Iapp*.

¹⁴ Yet for Spinoza, God has no will, but acts only from necessity (IP32). We can only be said to be free by acting according to the necessity of our nature (ID7). We can therefore liberate ourselves only through the power of reason (IVP37s; IVP68d). Spinoza adds that "a thing is called contingent only because of a defect of our knowledge and that because the order of causes is hidden from us, it can never seem to us either necessary or impossible. So we call it contingent or possible" (IP32s). According to Spinoza, only a completely irrational person views nature as if its laws functioned with contingency. True freedom, by Spinoza's telling, comes from intuitive understanding.

believe that Nature (which they think does nothing except for the sake of some end) looks to them, and sets them before itself as models ... Nature does nothing on account of an end. That eternal and infinite being we call God, *or* Nature, acts from the same necessity from which he exists ... The reason, therefore, *or* cause, why God, *or* Nature, acts, and the reason why exists, are one and the same. As he exists for the sake of no end, he also acts for the sake of no end.¹⁵

However, the affects are irreducible constraints on human knowing that can only be suppressed, thus we have an inescapable tendency to be led astray by the imagination by relying on purposes.¹⁶ In Spinoza's view, the guidance of reason leads one to see passions as effects of some cause with no purpose. Spinoza clearly denies that we can attribute final causality to nature.¹⁷ He reinforces his non-teleological account by stating that "*not many words will be required now to show that Nature has no end before it*, and that all final causes are nothing but human fictions."¹⁸ The defects that we find in nature are only the defects of our imagination due to a lack of knowledge concerning the necessity of God. According to Spinoza, the concept of teleology suffers from the same kind of weak theorizing that plagues dogmatic theology: purposes are fictions produced by the imagination.

These views of Spinoza forced some of the brightest thinkers of the following centuries to take issue with Spinozism. The *Aufklärer* of the late 18th century became largely interested in Spinoza's idea that reason supersedes traditional religion. In 1785 Jacobi launched a vehement counterattack against those thinkers, primarily because he regarded Spinozism as the ultimate expression of rationalism and atheism.¹⁹ The question he raised was *whether reason – on its own merit – could found a meaningful world at all*. The issue of Spinozism once again called the authority of reason into question. Kant was forced to enter the fray. If he could show that reason safeguards our moral and theoretical pursuits without positing

¹⁵ *E* IVpref.

¹⁶ *E* IIIIP9s.

¹⁷ Bennett (1984) incorrectly argues, in my view, that Spinoza has a concept of teleology. For reactions against Bennett, cf. Curley, Edwin, "On Bennett's Spinoza: The Issue of Teleology", in Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau (eds.), *Spinoza: Issues and Directions. The Proceedings of the Chicago Spinoza Conference*. Leiden, Brill, 1990, pp. 39–52; Rice, Lee C., "Spinoza, Bennett, and Teleology", *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 23 (2), 1999, pp. 241–53; and Lin, Martin, "Teleology and Human Action in Spinoza", *Philosophical Review*, 115 (3), 2006, pp. 317–54.

¹⁸ *E* Iapp/II/80, my emphasis.

¹⁹ Cf. Jacobi, Friedrich (1785), *Über die Lehre des Spinoza, in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*, in Heinrich Scholz (ed.), *Die Hauptschriften zum Pantheismusstreit zwischen Jacobi und Mendelssohn*, Berlin, Reuter & Reichard, 1916. While the *Pantheismusstreit* frames the background of Kant's confrontation with Spinoza, it is outside the bounds of this paper to discuss this issue.

the existence of God, he could both obviate the problem of Spinozism posed by Jacobi and endorse the critical use of reason.

2. Kant, Spinoza, and the Orientation of Reason

Prior to his critical confrontation with Spinoza, Kant had already argued that reason offered us a safe passage towards the idea of God. However, he warns that reason's insights into this idea are only hypothetical claims. Reason can never attain adequate knowledge of ideas such as God, the soul, or the world as such, but only unifies the understanding's cognition of nature through a regulative principle [*Prinzip*]. Kant was careful to distinguish the understanding from reason by designating the former as the faculty of rules and the latter as the "faculty of principles [*Prinzipien*]".²⁰ Kant considered both faculties to create principles, but the ideas of reason differ from pure concepts in that they aim for the unconditioned and allow the mind to regard nature as an encompassing system.²¹ Reason never refers directly to objects, Kant writes, but nonetheless instructs the understanding how to unify its cognitions via principles derived from the ideas of reason.²² This means that while the ideas of reason cannot make constitutive claims about objects, we are permitted to think of them *as if* they are real.

In his so-called "Orientation" essay (1786), Kant extends his claims that reason allows us to orient ourselves in thought beyond experience to a dispute with Spinoza.²³ Kant tells us that signposts such as the constellations in the sky guide our experience of the sensible world, while a feeling stimulated by reason guides

²⁰ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (hereafter cited as *KrV*), A299/B356, in *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 29 vols, Berlin, Walter De Gruyter, 1902-. All references to the *Critique of Pure Reason* are cited by A/B pagination. The translations cited in this paper are from the following edition: *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner Pluhar. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1996. Given the distinction in terminology here, I take this to mean that Kant distinguishes between the principles of the understanding [*Grundsätze*] and the principles of reason [*Prinzipien*]. The Hackett edition by Pluhar convolutes the distinction between *Prinzip* and *Grundsatz* everywhere. In contrast to this error, I follow several authors who maintain this distinction. Cf. Heimsoeth, Heinz, "Zum Kosmotheologischen Ursprung der Kantischen Freiheitsantinomie", *Kant-Studien*, 57, 1966, pp. 17–18; Sallis, John, *The Gathering of Reason* New York, SUNY Press, 1980, p. 42; and Goldman, 2012, pp. 39–44.

²¹ Kant, *KrV*, A645/B673.

²² Kant, *KrV*, A644/B672.

²³ Kant, "Was heißt: sich im Denken Orientieren?" (hereafter WDO), 8:136, cited in *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 8, Berlin, Walter De Gruyter, 1902. The English translation appears in Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni (eds. and trans.), *Religion and Rational Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

our inner (moral) ground of orientation. He agrees with Spinoza that reason desires totality, but he qualifies this agreement by stating that we must reason only through subjective principles, otherwise reason conflates the unconditioned with sensible conditions and, thus, the idea of an original being with objective reality. According to Spinoza, substance (God) constitutes the objective ground of all reality. He claims that through the use of reason we can understand the world as a whole subtended by substance, but that only through intuitive knowledge – i.e., rationality in its highest sense – can we understand the essential nature of things as caused by God. In Kant’s view, by contrast, our idea of God must remain precisely an idea, as it does not *constitute* nature, but merely *regulates* our experience of nature.²⁴

Kant argues that the theological idea merely gives us to the capacity to think of a highest being as an idea, but never as an object. While we cannot know God intuitively, Kant claims that we could attribute such powers to God for regulative purposes. In an intuitive understanding the powers of intuition and understanding would be essentially one.²⁵ According to Kant, it is not necessary to provide a positive definition of God to account for nature as a system. It suffices to point out that the regulative idea of a being with an intuitive understanding orients our reflection on the purposes in nature and thus makes it possible to conceive of our empirical cognitions as elements of an encompassing whole.

3. The Principle of Purposiveness in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*

Kant’s “Orientation” essay thus applied the argument for the critical use of reason to a minor engagement with Spinoza. In the third *Critique*, Kant systematically confronts Spinoza in order to set up his account of purposiveness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*]. In this section, I discuss this principle in view of its relation to the theological idea of reason and the power of teleological judgment.²⁶

²⁴ Kant, WDO, 8:139, cf. 141.

²⁵ Kant, *KrV*, B72. Cf. especially B145-6. Also cf. A252; A287/B343-44; B72, 135, 138n, 139, 145, 149, 153, 159, 307–09 where Kant juxtaposes the idea of an intuition and understanding different from ours.

²⁶ According to Kant, teleological judgments, like aesthetic judgments that begin with the particular in nature, are reflective judgments. However, teleological judgments present the concept alongside this reflection. In my encounter with a High Sierra meadow I make aesthetic judgments by merely reflecting on the form of the beauty of the meadow with no intention of judging its purposiveness, but if I view this place as though it were to be a suitable place for farming, then I am making an instrumental or teleological judgment (cf. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (hereafter *KU*), § 15, 5:228, in *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 5,

Unlike Spinoza, Kant argues that the finality of nature can be grasped by the human mind, but only through the regulative use of the ideas of reason. While the ideas of reason are themselves indeterminate, they unify teleological judgments through the principle of natural purposes, which, I argue, derives from the theological idea of reason. This principle allows the power of judgment to reflect on given objects and to communicate this givenness to the understanding.²⁷ Teleological judgments allow us to conceive of nature as a unity in conformity with the theological idea that instructs the principle of purposiveness.²⁸ Kant writes that “the concept of natural purposes leads reason into an order of things that is wholly different from that of a mere natural mechanism.”²⁹

However, in Kant’s view, we cannot simply dismiss mechanical laws, and therefore, an antinomy emerges when we judge nature according to mechanism and final causes.³⁰ As with the dynamic antinomies of reason, both positions are legitimate.³¹ In this case, reason cannot instruct the power of judgment on how to resolve this antinomy because it uses an a priori principle that cannot be applied to mere empirical laws. A solution cannot be offered in the domain of determinative judgment either, for in that case reason would have to prescribe an objective principle to the understanding, which means that the understanding would make transcendent claims beyond the bounds of possible experience. So, teleological judgments must acknowledge both the mechanical laws of nature and consider the world as product of an intelligent cause “that acts according to purposes [*nach Zwecken handelnden*].”³²

Kant argues that reason allows us to find an intentional purpose in everything.³³ The question at stake is whether or not the concept of natural purposes can reach beyond nature to discover a “special kind of causality [*besondere Art der Kausalität*].”³⁴ Kant claims in this regard that natural products can be viewed

Berlin, Walter De Gruyter, 1902-. The English translations appear in *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1987).

²⁷ Kant, *KU*, § 77, 405.

²⁸ Kant, *KU*, IV, 5:180.

²⁹ Kant, *KU*, § 66, 377: “Denn dieser Begriff führt die Vernunft in eine ganz andere Ordnung der Dinge, als die eines bloßen Mechanismus der Natur”.

³⁰ Kant, *KU*, § 70, 387.

³¹ This statement is only true in light of the dynamic antinomies, as Kant points out that both the thesis and the antithesis in the mathematical antinomies must be “declared false” (cf. KrV, A531–32/B559–60). I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing out this distinction between the mathematical and dynamic antinomies.

³² Kant, *KU*, § 71, 389.

³³ Kant, *KU*, § 67, 379; § 74, 396.

³⁴ Kant, *KU*, § 72, 390. Kant introduces the concept of a *Technik der Natur* to define this problem. Nature’s *Technik* either accounts for its ability to produce things in terms of purposes giving it an

from two perspectives. First, the perspective of *extrinsic purposiveness* reveals, for instance, the way a river allows people to trade goods and travel more efficiently. However, Kant asserts that this view does not allow us to adequately consider the purposiveness of natural products.³⁵ While it does allow us to see the organization at play in nature, this view still relies on the mechanical aspects of that very organization. For this reason, he holds that we must seek a concept of nature beyond its extrinsic purposiveness.³⁶

Second, the *intrinsic purposiveness* of things refers us to a supersensible basis that allows us to cognize nature in terms of its final purposiveness.³⁷ Kant writes this idea can only be discovered through reason. Accordingly, he claims that the principle of purposiveness does not endorse the power of judgment to offer a determinative explanation of natural products (which rely on empirical laws). Rather, he offers a solution to the problem of the division of mechanism and teleology by stating that they both stem from the principle of the purposiveness.³⁸ No matter how much the mechanical laws teach us about nature, they will never reach as high as this teleological principle.

intentional status, or its ability to regulate itself like a machine meaning the *Technik* is unintentional (§ 72, 391).

³⁵ According to Kant, the very possibility of an organic body that agrees with the unity of nature comes from an idea of reason that extends the principle of purposiveness over all of nature. By doing so, reason furnishes the idea of a supersensible unity that governs the products of nature (cf. Kant, *KU*, § 66, 377; § 68, 383).

³⁶ Kant, *KU*, § 67, 378.

³⁷ This distinction in kinds of purposiveness has caused rifts among commentators, the nature of which can be outlined as follows. Guyer argues that Kant distinguishes between two kinds of purposiveness: (1) relating to objects in terms of their design (this would apply to organisms); (2) relating to objects of the beautiful and sublime nature (cf. Guyer, Paul, *Kant and the Claims of Taste*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 213–18). According to section XII of the third *Critique's* First Introduction, Guyer's claims are correct in the second sense, but I think that Kant has a much broader conception of purposiveness, or what he calls the "lawfulness of the contingent in general" (§ 76, 404; cf. "First Introduction" (hereafter FI), trans. Werner Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, pp. 249–50). Ginsborg argues against Guyer in favor of a normative conception of purposiveness, while Zuckert contests Ginsborg's claim by arguing that the principle of purposive unity relies on the "unity of diversity as such" (cf. Ginsborg, Hannah, "Kant on Aesthetic and Biological Purposiveness", in A. Reath, B. Herman, and C. Korsgaard (eds.), *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; Zuckert, Rachel, *Kant on Beauty and Biology: An Interpretation of the "Critique of Judgment"*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 15). Most recently, Teufel has added a further argument against Ginsborg by stating that Kant's account of purposiveness is non-teleological (cf. Teufel, Thomas "Kant's Non-Teleological Conception of Purposiveness", *Kant-Studien*, 102, 2011, pp. 233–252).

³⁸ Kant, *KU*, § 78, 414.

Whereas on Kant's account human reason cannot completely fuse mechanism and teleology, it can, and must, think a "supreme understanding" that would have the capacity to do so.³⁹ Kant thus retains the idea of an "original organization [*ursprüngliche Organisation*]" in nature derived from the idea of God, but only for regulative purposes.⁴⁰ He explains that

whenever we encounter, in experience, something belonging to teleology, it refers objects of experience solely to judgment, namely, to a principle [*Grundsatz*] of this power by which, as reflective judgment, it legislates to itself (not to nature). It is true that the concept of purposes and of purposiveness is a concept of reason insofar as we attribute to reason the basis that makes an object [*Objekt*] possible. But the purposiveness of nature, or even the concept of things as natural purposes, relates reason, as cause, to things where no experience informs us that reason is the basis that makes them possible.⁴¹

Kant insists that reason and judgment apply this principle reciprocally. On the one hand, he argues that we derive the concept of purposiveness from reason.⁴² He writes that the "concept of a thing as a natural purpose is one that subsumes nature under a causality that is conceivable only by reason."⁴³ On the other hand, he holds that the concept of a natural purpose employed by judgment allows us to determine the *object* of the rational idea. As I see it, the domain of teleological judgment, guided by the principle of purposiveness, thus creates the moment in which the theological idea directs judgment towards reflecting on objects in nature.

A *critique* of judgment presupposes that reason orients judgment in the domain of empirical cognition, but reason must no less rely on the power of judgment that reflects on the organization of nature. For Kant, the power of judgment acts "for the sake of reason" by applying the rule for the use of the principle of purposiveness.⁴⁴ In this way, the power of judgment not only prepares the understanding for the use of such a principle, but we can see nature as if it does us

³⁹ Kant, *KU*, § 78, 414.

⁴⁰ Kant, *KU*, § 80, 418.

⁴¹ Kant, FI 20:234.

⁴² Cf. Deleuze, 1963, p.63; Guyer, Paul, "Kant's Principles of Reflecting Judgment", in Paul Guyer (ed.), *Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment: Critical Essays*, Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield, 2003, pp. 17–43; and Goldman, 2012, 45.

⁴³ Kant, *KU*, § 74, 396.

⁴⁴ Kant, *KU*, VIII, 5:193–4.

a favor.⁴⁵ Therefore, the reciprocal relationship reason and judgment provides the connection between theology (intuitive understanding) and teleology (purposes).

According to Kant, Spinoza completely stripped nature of its purposive unity by claiming that the organization of nature can be explained merely through mechanical laws. In order to oppose Spinoza's thoroughgoing determinism, Kant argues that we should view nature not solely according to mechanical laws, but also in terms of its purposive unity.

4. Kant's Criticism of Spinoza

Thus far, we have seen that, for Kant, reason orients us in our pursuit of experience, but does not make constitutive claims about nature. In this section I will argue that in the third *Critique* Kant introduces his criticism of Spinoza as a transition from his account of the principle of purposiveness to his concept of intuitive understanding.

It makes real sense that Kant would decide to engage more seriously with Spinoza in this work than he had done previously. His reflections on teleology no doubt led him to take issue with much of Spinoza's metaphysics.⁴⁶ Kant writes that all previous accounts of nature's purposiveness had resulted in dogmatism because – whether they explain nature as intentional or unintentional – they all ignore the subjective maxim that makes such a judgment regarding purposiveness possible. Kant dismisses Spinoza's account because he, on the one hand, states that nature is grounded in a supersensible being, but then Spinoza depletes this being of any intelligence. Spinoza, Kant writes,

wants to relieve us of any need to inquire into the basis that makes purposes of nature [*dem Grunde der Möglichkeit der Zwecke der Natur*], and wants to deprive the idea of this basis of all reality. He does this by refusing to count them as products at all. Instead he regards them as accidents that inhere in an original being; and he attributes to this being, the substrate of those natural things, not causality regarding these things, but merely *subsistence*. Thus Spinoza does indeed provide natural forms with something that all purposiveness requires – viz., unity in their basis [*Einheit des Grundes*]. (For the original being is unconditionally necessary, and so are all natural things, which inhere in it as accidents.) But the unity of purpose, which is also required for such purposiveness, cannot be thought unless the natural forms are also contingent; and yet Spinoza

⁴⁵ Kant, *KU*, § 58, 350.

⁴⁶ Cf. Alison, 2001.

has taken this contingency away from them and has thus also deprived these forms of everything intentional, and has deprived the original basis [*Urgrunde*] of natural things of all understanding.⁴⁷

Kant is not wrong here. Spinoza indeed claims that nature has no contingency, since every mode corresponds to an effect of the necessary cause of God. However, Kant argues that Spinoza goes wrong for two reasons. First, he argues that Spinoza disregards the causality of natural products by viewing them as they merely inhere in substance. Second, he denied intelligence in God.

He allows that Spinoza's system can explain the purposes of beings in connection to a single substance, but states that he cannot argue for a unity of purposes because he has taken intelligence away from substance. In other words, Kant argues that Spinoza can maintain that modes are contingent and outside of God, but that in this case they can no longer be the necessary inner effects of God. In Kant's view, Spinoza reduces the purposiveness of nature to our mere knowledge of God as substance, which means that the purposive form that he consolidates in one being is merely idealistic. Kant says that Spinoza's system is also *hyper-physical* because we explain our knowledge of substance through mechanical laws alone.⁴⁸ By Kant's standard, the unity of purposes requires both that we explain the cause of natural products and that this cause results from an intelligent God. In his view, "Spinozism does not accomplish" either of these demands, and hence, it can only account for "blind necessity."⁴⁹

For Kant, Spinozism makes dogmatic claims concerning the mechanism of nature that are untenable. He writes that we can find an alternative to these dogmatic claims by turning to a subjective principle.⁵⁰ In my view, Kant's account of reason aimed to demonstrate the necessity of teleology and purposiveness, which he situates against the anti-teleological nature of Spinoza's metaphysics. Kant is clear that reflective judgments are oriented by the principle of purposiveness. In what follows I will examine his account of the idea of reason responsible for this orientation.

⁴⁷ Kant, *KU*, § 73, 393.

⁴⁸ Kant, *KU*, § 73, 394.

⁴⁹ Kant, *KU*, § 73, 394; § 73, 393.

⁵⁰ Kant, *KU*, § 72, 392n.

5. The Regulative Role of the Theological Idea in the *Critique of Judgment*

Kant responds to Spinoza's claim that our kind of understanding can achieve intuitive knowledge by arguing that such an understanding is not granted to human beings, but that we have to assume a being capable of such an understanding even if the latter cannot be known. As I see it, Kant's account of the regulative use of the theological idea creates the principle of purposiveness that directs our power of judgment for the sake of empirical cognition. Kant states that we find the causality of natural purposes only in our *idea* of that causality. Natural purposes therefore conform to this idea of God, but Kant cautions the reader to regard this idea merely as "a principle of reason for the power of [reflective] judgment, not for the understanding."⁵¹ He writes that the the idea of a natural purpose

concerns a peculiarity of our (human) understanding in relation to the power of judgment and its reflection on things of nature. But if that is so, then *we must here be presupposing the idea of some possible understanding different from the human one* (just as, in the *Critique or Pure Reason*, we had to have in mind a possible different intuition if we wanted to consider ours as a special kind, namely, as an intuition for which objects count only as appearances).⁵²

The laws of natural forms can never be known systematically in terms of their causality, despite their agreement with mechanical laws. However, the mere thought of such a being that intuits all things in themselves allows us to reflect on our contingent experience of nature as if it were regulated by an intelligent causality⁵³ He elaborates this point when he writes that "if our understanding were intuitive it would have no objects [*Gegenstände*] except actual ones."⁵⁴ The caveat is that Kant's remark does not concern a real intuitive understanding. Rather, he aims only to detail the "peculiarity of the human understanding that makes the concept of a natural purpose possible."⁵⁵ Thus, Kant derives the principle of pur-

⁵¹ Kant, *KU*, § 77, 405.

⁵² Kant, *KU*, § 77, 405, my emphasis. In the first *Critique*, Kant states that his doctrine of sensibility represents the negative definition of noumenon. He writes that simply because our understanding must refer to sensible intuitions does not preclude the idea of an understanding that does not require sensibility, for the negative meaning of noumenon is that this intuitive understanding would cognize "von Dingen, die der Verstand sich ohne diese Beziehung auf unsere Anschauungsart, mithin nicht bloß als Erscheinungen, sondern als Dinge an sich selbst denken muß" (B307). I would like to thank the reviewer for clarifying this negative definition of Kant's.

⁵³ Kant, *KU*, § 76, 404.

⁵⁴ Kant, *KU*, § 76, 402.

⁵⁵ Kant, *KU*, § 77, 405.

positiveness from the idea of a possible understanding distinct from ours. While our discursive understanding must begin from parts and ascend to the whole, the reverse holds for the intuitive understanding that spontaneously produces both the whole and the part that it intuits.

Previously we saw that Spinoza regarded intuitive understanding as the pinnacle of human cognition, for it yields a true understanding of God. Kant's account of intuitive understanding, by contrast, has a critical stipulation: we are only permitted to think of a being endowed with intuitive understanding as a *regulative* idea. Our discursive understanding always determines appearances contingently. The particular presented in intuition comes from something given to us that we do not spontaneously determine.⁵⁶ For this reason, our discursive understanding must regard the harmony between the universal concept and the particular in nature contingently because of the variety of natural products. But Kant argues that we can also think the idea of an understanding that abolishes this necessary restriction.⁵⁷

Kant's point can be summarized as follows: the only way we can make sense of the contingent harmony between nature and our understanding thereof is to think of an understanding *other than our own* that would intuit the material causality of things necessarily. The regulative idea of an original causality provides reason with a subjective principle of that unity that further allows the power of judgment to reflect on nature as a system of the "lawfulness of the contingent [*Gesetzlichkeit des Zufälligen*]." ⁵⁸ The theological idea provides an indeterminate regulative principle for the power of judgment to reflect on nature in our "pursuit of experience."⁵⁹ While the diversity of natural products will forever remain contingent, the products of nature are nonetheless bound to a transcendental lawfulness that conforms to the unity of experience.⁶⁰

According to Kant, our understanding – using the concept of purposes to mediate between the universal and the particular – juxtaposes its own contingent activity with that of the intuitive understanding. However, this does not mean that it posits the actual existence of the intuitive understanding. The idea of intuitive (archetypal) understanding achieved by reason merely allows the power of judgment to regulate its contingent reflection on nature. As Kant warns, reason's desire for the absolute has always tempted it to make a transcendent use of concepts. Kant,

⁵⁶ Kant, *KU*, § 77, 406.

⁵⁷ Kant, *KU*, § 77, 406.

⁵⁸ Kant, *KU*, § 76, 404.

⁵⁹ Kant, *KU*, § 77, 405.

⁶⁰ Förster, 2012, pp. 140–43.

however, provides a critical turn. He claims that reason has the power of creating principles and can therefore translate what is transcendent to the understanding into a subjective principle that aides the power of judgment immanently.⁶¹ Thus, Kant's third *Critique* shows us that reflection awakens a depth in the power of judgment hitherto not expressed in determinative judgments for "what matters here is how *our* understanding relates to judgment."⁶² The peculiarity of our understanding, unlike an intuitive one that spontaneously determines everything, is that we reflect on anything at all. This idea of reason pushes the power of judgment beyond the threshold of the understanding's cognition of nature.

In no place does Kant ever claim that this so-called intuitive understanding was a real possibility for our discursive mind. Spinoza's dogmatic conception of the third kind of knowledge, in Kant's view, would completely obliterate the distinction between our intellect and God's. Kant thus warns us that "he who shows us the cliffs has not necessarily set them up, and even if someone maintains that it is impossible to pass through them *with full sails* (of dogmatism), he has not on that account denied every possibility of getting through."⁶³ The two cliffs represent the mechanical and teleological explanations of nature.⁶⁴ By Kant's account, Spinoza's efforts to avoid the latter cliff led him to expel the idea of intelligent causality underlying nature altogether.

As Kant sees it, Spinoza's rakish route to theology (*physico-theology*) reaches an impasse. By contrast, Kant appeals to a moral teleology that does not claim that we can prove the existence of God by means of a theological account.⁶⁵ Rather, the regulative idea of an infinite intuitive understanding allows Kant's account to pass through the imposing bluffs of mechanism and teleology without making dogmatic claims. We must assume that this archetypal understanding grasps the totality of the mechanical laws of nature, while our finite understanding has no such access.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Kant, *KU*, § 76, 403.

⁶² Kant, *KU*, § 77, 406. Cf. Deleuze, 1963, p. 60.

⁶³ Kant, *Briefe*, 11:76 in *Kants gesammelte Schriften, herausgegeben von der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, vol. 10, Berlin, Walter De Gruyter, 1902-. Also available in *Correspondence*, trans. Arnulf Zweig, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁶⁴ Lord, 2009, 59.

⁶⁵ Kant, *KU*, § 86, 442. Cf. *KU*, 5:481 in which Kant writes, "Moral teleology alone can provide us with the concept of a *single* author of the world suitable for theology." For Kant, teleological judgments show us that we are the *ultimate purpose* [*letzter Zweck*] of nature because we are the only beings that can form a system of purposes in nature in terms of the final causes of all things, and yet, we are also the final purpose because we are the only moral beings with the supersensible capacity of freedom (§ 82, 426-7; § 84, 435). Spinoza's dismissal of teleology, on Kant's telling, can account for neither the ends of nature, nor the moral destiny of human freedom.

⁶⁶ Kant, *KU*, § 75, 398; § 80, 418. Some commentators argue that organisms are virtually unknowable through mechanical explanation alone, and hence, that we have to rely on a teleological account

Our understanding regards the particulars in nature as contingent – and therefore the power of judgment requires the principle of purposiveness to conceive of its empirical cognitions as elements of a system. Thus, when Kant connects the power of reflective judgment to the principle of purposiveness, he highlights three conditions regarding teleology and theology that I think must be understood in light of his engagement with Spinoza. The concepts of unity, causality, and intelligence each correspond to two basic problems that Kant sought to resolve in the third *Critique*: the resolution of the antinomy of judgment and the defense of contingency in nature, each of which centers on his criticism of Spinoza.⁶⁷ Foregrounding the principle of purposiveness allows us to see that, for Kant, reflective judgment is guided by a regulative idea of reason in our pursuit of experience. I think that Kant’s meditations on Spinoza’s metaphysics inaugurate the occasion for Kant to reflect on the boundary of our reason and its ability to think the idea of an intuitive understanding that communicates the supersensible unity of nature to us.

6. Conclusion

My aim has been to show that we can clarify Kant’s objective in the *Critique of Judgment* by casting light on his critical meditation on Spinozism. Kant took issue with Spinoza by arguing that while we cannot cognize an ontological substrate that lies at the basis of nature, the nature of our reason forces us to look for an original intuitive understanding – though unknowable – that causes the world, because otherwise our reflection on nature would be unceasingly chaotic. For Kant, the theological idea shepherds our contingent experience of the infinite variety of phe-

(cf. Allison Henry E. “Kant’s Antinomy of Teleological Judgment”, *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 30, 1991, pp. 25–42; Zanetti, Véronique, “Die Antinomie der teleologischen Urteilskraft”, *Kant-Studien*, 83, 1993, pp. 341–355; and Guyer, 2003). Ginsborg refutes those claims (cf. “Kant on Understanding Organisms as Natural Purposes”, in Eric Watkins (ed.), *Kant and the Sciences*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001; “Two Kinds of Mechanical Inexplicability in Kant and Aristotle”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 42 (1), 2004, pp. 33–65). McLaughlin argues that Kant’s concept of intuitive understanding allows him to claim that mechanism refers to a special kind of causality – as I have argued above – that does not entail that the mechanism of nature itself does not rely on the organization of the parts that comprise the whole (cf. 1989, pp. 122–23; also cf. *KU* § 77, 407).

⁶⁷ See on this Zammito, 1992, p. 248; Allison, 2001, p. 219; and Lord, 2009, p. 9. All, in my view, correctly point out that the *Critique of Judgment* centers on Kant’s confrontation with Spinoza. However, I disagree with each commentator for two reasons. First, the concept of “intelligence” should be cast in the light of Kant’s discussion concerning intuitive understanding. Second, I disagree that Spinozism represents a third problem to be solved. Rather, Spinozism is the focal point through which Kant solves the other two problems.

nomena in a way that goes beyond the regulative functions of the ideas of reason treated in the first *Critique*. Both Kant and Spinoza maintain that reason offers us a beacon in a maelstrom of unending passions that disorient us, but I think that within the depths of Kant's criticism of Spinoza in the third *Critique* – that often seem like little more than pithy asides – resides his insight that we cannot make sense of the world without the principle of purposiveness. Thus, Spinoza represented the very position that Kant needed to confront in order to disclose how the regulative principles of reason illuminate our otherwise cloudy reflections on the unity of nature.