**Alive and free: are organisms autonomous according to Kant?**

## Introduction

In recent years, the topic of non-human animal agency and how it relates to our own has gained attention in philosophical discussion. First, from the philosophy of biology, with research such as Alvaro Moreno and Matteo Mossio's, who argue, picking up from, among many others, the stream of 1970s proponents of autopoiesis in living systems, that *biological autonomy* is a defining feature of living beings in general, where a system is "autonomous" and therefore "biological" insofar as it exhibits what they call constitutive closure and, crucially, agency. Second, from the philosophy of action. Notably, Helen Steward has defended a strong, indeterministic notion of agency as "settling states of affairs" that includes most motile animals. Animals, it seems to many, are at some level different in how they produce the effects they are causally responsible for, especially when compared to mechanisms or non-living objects.

Autonomy and freedom, of course, are absolutely foundational in Kant's practical philosophy, and they stand out as the anthropocentric pinnacle of his rationalist ethics. Nonetheless, Kant himself devoted quite some effort to laying out a theory of organisms as peculiar beings that resist mechanical explanation. Thus, the question that motivates this presentation: can organisms, according to Kant, be autonomous? If they can, this would have massive implications for the prospects of a Kantian animal ethics; but, even if they are not, I will argue, a closer look at Kant's theory of living beings can have interesting implications for his practical philosophy.

I will start by addressing a potentially fatal objection to this point of inquiry. If autonomy is determination by rational principles, then it is a non-starter to seek it in non-rational beings. I will, thus, first specify what sort of *sui generis* autonomy we may be after

if at all. Then, I will present two possible approaches to arguing that organisms are autonomous according to Kant. First, one focusing on the causal anomaly that organisms presumptively exhibit, itself comprising a strong and a weak reading. According to them, organisms either violate the law of causality espoused in the Second Analogy, or they act through "nomological gaps" left undetermined by the general laws of physics. I will contend that both are unacceptable positions. Secondly, I sketch a more plausible account under which organisms could be autonomous, based on the resolution to the antinomy of teleological judgment by which we must posit, according to Kant, that organisms have their possibility grounded in a purposive supersensible substratum. While less problematic, I contend that ascribing autonomy in this way would lead to a classic concern with Kant's theory of freedom: we would have grounds to attribute autonomy to everything in nature. I finally conclude with a moderate takeaway. Organisms cannot be said to be autonomous according to Kant, but the fact that we must regard them as intelligibly grounded both easily opens the door to a Kantian – though not Kant's – animal ethics, and it motivates a reading of Kant's theory of freedom that isn't as fastidiously anthropocentric as it is generally taken to be.

## A non-starter?

Kant doesn't leave much room for interpretation when it comes to the link between rationality, autonomy and moral standing in the central texts he devotes to investigating this matter. Though there is much controversy about what exactly it means for us to be autonomous, whether it is about our literally bringing moral worth into the world through our self-legislating (Korsgaard, 1996), or about there being certain *a priori* principles of practical reason we are immediately under the legislative scope of (Kleingeld & Willaschek, 2019), there is no argument that our autonomy has to do with

reason. First, in the *Groundwork*, which introduces autonomy, in opposition to heteronomy, as the core thruster of Kantian ethics:

> "Natural necessity was a heteronomy of efficient causes; for every effect was possible only according to the law that something else determines the efficient cause to causality; what else, then, can freedom of the will be, but autonomy, **i.e. the property of the will of being a law to itself**?" (GMS 4: 446.21-447.2)

Here, Kant straight-up identifies autonomy in general with the autonomy of the will. And it makes sense, since autonomy is "the ground of the dignity of a human and of every rational nature" (GMS 4: 436.6-7). Without entering into the many contentious details around Kant's metaethics, if moral worth is derived from a purely good will, determined only by the form of willing in general, then "autonomy" is a notion meant to describe this particular sort of willing, and is associated with practical reason from the beginning.

This may seem, then, like the end of the road Now, this is the state of things in the *Groundwork*. Six years later, we find the *Critique of Judgment*, the introduction(s) to which lay out a complete picture of Kant's mature theory of the pure faculties of human intellect. Here, Kant generalizes the notion of autonomy to apply to faculties of the intellect in general. The understanding and reason are properly autonomous because they legislate *a priori* constitutive principles over their respective domains. The power of judgment, as is well known, doesn't have autonomy proper, but earns a special spot as a heautonomous faculty, since it also introduces a priori principles, though only regulative, as they apply on the faculty itself rather than on objects it may determine:

> "the rule of the power of judgment, which is thus legislative with regard to the conditions of reflection a priori, and demonstrates **autonomy**; this autonomy is not, however (like that of the understanding, with regard to the theoretical laws of nature,

or of reason, in the practical laws of freedom), valid objectively, i.e., through concepts of things or possible actions, but is merely subjectively valid, for the judgment from feeling, which, if it can make a claim to universal validity, demonstrates its origin grounded in a priori principles. Strictly speaking, one must call this legislation **heautonomy**, since the power of judgment does not give the law to nature nor to freedom, but solely to itself" (FI 20: 225)

"The power of judgment thus also has in itself an a priori principle for the possibility of nature, though only in a subjective respect, by means of which it prescribes a law, not to nature (as autonomy), but to itself (as heautonomy) for reflection on nature" (KU 5: 185-6)

We now have, then, an extended concept of autonomy that goes beyond that of the autonomy of the will. A faculty is autonomous, according to Kant, in a broad sense if it can prescribe principles *a priori*, of its own constitution; and in a restricted sense if it can determine objects in doing so.

What could autonomy possibly mean, then, when applied to organisms? Well, we know that the general concept of autonomy entails prescribing a law that is proper to a faculty instead of, so to speak, borrowed from an external source. With beings in the world instead of faculties of the intellect, and given the background we already went over about what seems to matter with animal autonomy, it seems like we will want them to be autonomous regarding the causality of their actions. If this is going to be an interesting result, organisms cannot just be autonomous in their production of effects in the sense that a "turnspit" is, as per the famous example in the second *Critique*; that is, their autonomy cannot just be a "comparative" sense in which their effects are more "internally determined" than others. But they cannot be properly free in the sense of acting according

to principles of pure reason. We thus have a general principle for an extended sense of autonomy, and two boundary conditions that the autonomy of organisms should meet. Thankfully, Kant gives us the tools to make sense of that notion, even if by a different name, in the resolution to the Third Antinomy.

The core investigation of Kant's critical metaphysics of freedom, the resolution to the Third Antinomy, has two parts: "the possibility of causality through freedom unified with the universal law of natural necessity", and "clarification of the cosmological idea of a freedom in combination with the universal natural necessity". Kant ostensibly sought to solve the same problem in both – how we can be free despite the world of appearances being ruled by the law of cause and effect –, with the latter being a more thorough explanation, but the way in which the two approaches differ is greatly useful. Kant starts the "clarification" by say that, in the prior section, he had "found it good first to sketch the silhouette of a solution to our transcendental problem" (KrV A 532/ B 570). As I read it, the "possibility" section lays out a formal machinery that the "clarification" section applies to the specific case where we actually have credence to attribute freedom: that of humans, who are rational beings. (KrV A 546-7/ B 574-5)

> "Yet the human being, who is otherwise acquainted with the whole of nature solely through sense, knows himself also through pure apperception, and indeed in actions and inner determinations which cannot be accounted at all among^ impressions of sense; he obviously is in one part phenomenon, but in another part, namely in regard to certain faculties, he is a merely intelligible object, because the actions of this object cannot at all be ascribed to the receptivity of sensibility."[1]

[1] (this argument for the reality of freedom, if at all, is likely to have been dropped by the Second Critique (Saunders, 2021; Allison, 2020), but wherever Kant finds the grounds to assent to the reality of freedom, be it

The "possibility" section, in line with the resolution to the other antinomies, deals with the abstract problem of finding place for an absolute causal origin despite the conditions of possibility of experience not allowing for such thing amid appearances. As a dynamical antinomy, this possibility can be upheld, at least in thought, via the phenomenon/noumenon distinction:

> "Of [a free being] one would say quite correctly that it begins its effects in the sensible world from itself, without its action beginning in it itself; and this would hold without allowing effects in the world of sense to begin from themselves, because in this world they are always determined beforehand by empirical conditions in the preceding time, but only by means of the empirical character (which is a mere appearance of the intelligible character), and they are possible only as a continuation of the series of natural causes." (A 541/ B 569)

It is this generic concept of cosmological freedom, without the specification of rational activity, that I will use to characterize the possible autonomy of organisms. We can now say, then, that an organism is autonomous in the relevant sense if and only if it can be said to be, in a certain respect, the absolute beginning of its effects in the sensible world. Whatever it does, it does so because of its inner determination, and not just comparatively inner determination, like that of a turnspit, but properly inner as to be plausibly be called a causal *origin* of the ensuing chain. I will keep using the word "autonomy" in any case to follow modern usage. An expansive sense of cosmological freedom or even, contentious as it may be, causal spontaneity would probably be more

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our rational faculties or awareness of the moral law, I think the clarification section is still best read as the relevant application of the abstract possibility section.

accurate as we can see for Kant, but these terms would be more obscure in the current philosophy of biology and action jargon.

## Brief overview of Kant's theory of organisms

As ever, Kant's theory of organisms is the matter of not little controversy, so, for now, I will just refresh the main aspects of it, to see why it could make sense to construe Kant as implicitly attributing this sort of autonomy to them. Since his 1755 *Universal History* (cf. McLaughlin, 1992: 25ff.), Kant held that the explanatory tools of Newtonian physics couldn't quite account for the peculiarities of living beings, but, of course, it is in the *Critique of Teleological Judgment* that we find his most complete account of living beings and why he held such a position.

Kant's well-known stance, in a word, is that we have a subjective necessity to judge organisms as natural ends. That is, we can only understand their possibility through conceptual grounding:

> "For we adduce a teleological ground when we ascribe causality in regard to an object to a concept of the object as if it were to be found in nature (not in us), or rather we represent the possibility of the object in accordance with the analogy of such a causality (like the kind we encounter in ourselves), and hence we conceive of nature as technical through its own capacity; whereas if we did not ascribe such an agency to it, we would have to represent its causality as a blind mechanism." (KU 5: 360)

In sections §64 and §66 of the third *Critique*, Kant gives two successive definitions of natural ends, beings we have to judge in this manner. The first is provisional, the second,

definitive, but both are useful in understanding why Kant saw teleology as a must in our biological judgments:

> "I would say provisionally that a thing exists as a natural end **if it is cause and effect of itself** (although in a twofold sense)" (KU 5: 370-1)

> "An organized product of nature is that in which everything is an end and reciprocally a means as well" (KU 5: 376)

The former boils down to an effect being a cause of its cause, and the latter, to parts depending on the wholes they make up. Our determining judgments can make sense of effects that follow causes, per the Second Analogy of experience, and they can make sense of parts composing wholes, (maybe per the anticipations of perception). But we cannot make an objective judgment about an effect causing its own cause, or of a whole determining its parts. This point has been criticized by McLaughlin (2003), but it doesn't seem entirely unreasonable of Kant to claim that we can only objectively regard effects being caused by their causes and wholes depending on their parts. Further, without entering into details, Zuckert (2007) and Geiger (2022) convincingly argue that such restraints follow naturally from Kant's general notion of the discursivity of our understanding.

There is, however, a case in which we would understand these anomalies to have objective validity: in the products of technique. As Illetterati aptly notes (2014), these apparently backwards relations lose their mystery when we think of artifacts. A watch, to use a rather trite example, is in a sense a cause of itself: the representation of a watch in the head of a watchmaker results in a real watch. And the parts of a watch all are there in virtue of what the watch as a whole is intended to fulfil. The difference, of course, being

that living beings seem to exhibit the features of a product of intelligent design without being created by an intelligence:

> "An organized being is thus not a mere machine, for that has only a motive power, while the organized being possesses in itself a formative power, and indeed one that it communicates to the matter, which does not have it (it organizes the latter): thus it has a self-propagating formative power, which cannot be explained through the capacity for movement alone (that is, mechanism)" (5: 374)

When we judge an elephant as an elephant, without forfeiting the grammar of biology so to speak, we find that it is causally responsible for itself (by eating, it regenerates its tissues, etc.), and that its different parts are there in virtue and for the sake of the whole (a trunk makes no sense without an elephant to be the trunk of – in Aristotelian terms, such a trunk would only be "a trunk" by homonymy). And yet, elephants bear other elephants, there is no intelligent elephant-maker out there to explain them out.

We can then see why it is tempting to think of organisms under Kant's view as being absolute causal origins of their actions. They (we) are causally responsible for our own constitution, our inner determinations; we aren't just a billiard ball being hit by another one when we act. Let us see, then, how we could go about going from this characterization of organisms to the notion of autonomy we traced earlier.

## First attempt: the causal anomaly of organisms

One way of arguing why organisms would be causal origins of their actions in a special, or absolute way, would be by claiming that they are either an exception to or a fringe case for the law of cause and effect laid out in the Second Analogy of experience. If organisms

are not privy to the strict natural necessity that governs the rest of phenomena, then we have a very clear sense in which they would stand first in line for whatever chain of effects they might give rise to. Let us then analyse the two possible ways of construing this stance.

(a) A strong reading

The strong reading of the causal anomaly would have it that organisms are strict exceptions to the Second Analogy. This reading is elicited by Kant's Antinomy of Teleological Judgment, where Kant characterizes mechanical causation as a maxim of the reflecting power of judgment, instead of as a constitutive principle:

> "the maxims of a reflecting power of judgment that were initially expounded do not in fact contain any contradiction. For if I say that I must **judge** the possibility of all events in material nature and hence all forms, as their products, in accordance with merely mechanical laws, I do not thereby say that they **are possible only in accordance with such laws**". (5: 387)

These remarks led to a traditional reading of the *Critique of Judgment,* suggested by Beck in his *Commentary to the Critique of Practical Reason*, that regarded the Antinomy as abrogating the universality of the principle of cause and effect. This reading, however, has fallen out of favour in recent times (Juárregui, 2020), especially under closer examination of what the principle of mechanism is. In general, (Zuckert, 2007; McLaughlin, 2014), it is now understood that mechanistic causality isn't that prescribed by the Second Antinomy, but that covered in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, by which the laws ruling over physical bodies are ultimately dependent on the laws of motion that rule over their parts. Leaving this aside, however, there is an argument to be made that, to my judgment, rules quite decisively against the plausibility of such a reading.

The way in which the Second Analogy famously proves the universality of the law of cause and effect is through the distinction between objective and subjective successions (O' Shea, 1997). For there to be an objective succession of time, Kant argues, (and even to have such a thing as a meaningfully subjective succession, via the refutation of idealism) appearances need to be linked through necessary and universal connections in such a way that effects necessarily *follow* from their causes. Consider, then, that organisms didn't abide by any such laws. If that were so, either we would have no way of ascertaining objective successions in biological processes, which is entirely implausible, or Kant would have found a new way of establishing objective temporal successions. But then we would have to believe that Kant had found a substitute for the transcendental deduction and the principles of understanding without ever leaving any hints to that regard, or that he had forfeited transcendental idealism (which is certainly impossible, given his continued reliance on the phenomenon/noumenon distinction in later works). A principle of charity and the relative plausibility of the alternatives tilt the scale against the strong reading of the causal anomaly of organisms.

(b) A weak reading

We, however, do not need to be so radical as to regard organisms as absolute exceptions to the Second Analogy. Robert Hanna proposes an alternative in a 2007 paper; in it, much like Beck beforehand, he is discussing the possibility of human freedom, but his point can be extended to our current discussion.

Hanna argues that Kant realizes in the third *Critique* that we do not have an immediate warrant to assert the existence of "specific empirical laws of nature 'all the way down'" (Hanna and Moore, 2007: 121), and that organisms aren't subject to mechanistic laws. Because of this, there would exist "nomological gaps" open for one-off

laws to be created. These would not run amok of the general laws of mechanism, but they wouldn't be necessitated by it either. Now, of course, one-off laws do not suffice to account for the autonomy of organisms. If a one-off law is just another law but with the peculiarity that it is only ever instantiated by one being (2007: 126), this is just a contingent matter that should have no bearing on whether an agent is an absolute origin of its actions or not. The crux of Hanna's proposal is that it is the agent itself who creates these one-off laws.

How would this work? One way would be analogous to the resolution to the Third Antinomy, through an intelligible character that grounds a certain empirical law, which I will go over in the next section. Let us say, anyway, that, when an animal acts, it literally issues the law of its action, and it then becomes true. But how do we fathom that? Without an undergirding ground for it, there is nothing that makes the law true, but then how is it different from a mere empirical generalization? Kantian laws are necessary and universal (Hutton, 2021), they cannot just be a description of what happens to transpire in the world. But what is worse, if there were an underlying ground, then the law would not have been issued at the moment of action, it would just have been first instantiated then, and we are back at the problem whereby one-off laws are different from good old laws on account of a merely contingent fact.

All in all, the prospects of finding autonomy in odd or qualitatively distinct laws are dubious. If the laws are distinct enough that they will make organisms unique, then they might be distinct enough to breach the unity of experience. From the *Inaugural Dissertation* to the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant has been adamant on the need for a unified ground of empirical laws. In the former case, indeed, that is what defined a *world* for him. If they do not breach the unity of experience, however, it is very hard to understand what

about these laws would account for autonomy, instead of being the mere comparative freedom Kant charged against in the second *Critique*. To sum up, then, the prospects for the weaker reading don't seem much better.

> "*The substances which constitute the world are beings which derive from another being, though not from a number of different beings; they all derive from one being.* For suppose that they are caused by a number of necessary beings; the effects, of which the causes are free from any reciprocal relation, would not be in interaction. Therefore, the UNITY *in the conjunction of substances in the universe is a corollary of the dependence of all substances on one being*" (ID 2: 408)

**Second attempt: the intelligible grounding of organisms**

Some may have had a lingering concern during the whole past section, in that we shouldn't have been looking for an absolute causal beginning in anomalies at the level of appearances, but in the supersensible ground we must posit as underlying them per transcendental idealism. This is precisely in line with Kant's model of human freedom; as free agents, we can be regarded as absolute causal origins of our actions qua intelligible beings, while they remain ruled by natural necessity at the phenomenal level.

> "Is it not rather possible that although for every effect in appearance there is required a connection with its cause in accordance with laws of empirical causality, this empirical causality itself, without the least interruption of its connection with natural causes, could nevertheless be an effect of a causality that is not empirical, but rather intelligible[?]" (KrV A 544/ B 572)

This does away with the general problem I raised at the end of the last section, the content of empirical laws cannot suffice, while maintaining the unity of nature, to account

for any particularly strong causal beginning of actions; the ground of empirical laws, however, can. By standing outside of the chain of conditions, as Kant puts it, the intelligible ground that isn't subject to the law of cause and effect can be unconditioned.

What makes this reading all the more promising is Kant's resolution to the Antinomy of Teleological Judgment. Indeed, as opposed to the causal anomaly proposals, Kant appears to locate the ground of validity for our teleological judgments in the supersensible substratum of nature. For us to make our teleological and mechanical maxims compatible, we must assume that the mechanical and teleological are undergirded by a common intelligible ground.

> "Now of course the principle of the mechanism of nature and that of its causality according to ends in one and the same product of nature must cohere in a single higher principle and flow from it in common, because otherwise they could not subsist alongside one another in the consideration of nature [...] Now, however, the common principle of the mechanical derivation on the one side and the teleological on the other is the **supersensible**, on which we must base nature as phenomenon" (5: 412)

Inasmuch as we can't avoid to judge organisms teleologically, this supersensible ground has to account for their possibility in much of the same way that the intelligible character of free agents must ground their empirical character. (It could be argued that the intelligible ground of organisms isn't individual like that of free actions – we can discuss that in the Q&A bc it is a bit long). It may seem natural then to infer the autonomy of organisms: their possibility is grounded supersensibly, and so they can be regarded as absolute causal origins of their actions, right?

Let us consider, however, the following fragment from the introduction to the third *Critique*:

> "Now this principle [of reflective judgment] can be nothing other than this: that since universal laws of nature have their ground in our understanding, which prescribes them to nature [...] the particular empirical laws, in regard to that which is left undetermined in them by the former, must be considered in terms of the sort of unity they would have if an understanding (even if not ours) had likewise given them for the sake of our faculty of cognition [...] thus the principle of the power of judgment in regard to the form of things in nature under empirical laws in general is the **purposiveness of nature** in its multiplicity." (5: 180)

As Ido Geiger (2022) notes, if we treat the third *Critique* as a unified work, then we cannot read the resolution to the Antinomy of Teleological Judgment in isolation of this overarching puzzle of the necessity of particular empirical laws. If all empirical laws, however, have to be grounded in a supersensible ground that allows for purposive judgmeent, then an old problem around Kant's theory of freedom, put forward by Beck and, later, Bennett, resurfaces: every phenomenon falling under a particular empirical law of nature, that is, every single phenomenon, would count as autonomously produced. These aren't great prospects for a vindication of the peculiar autonomy of organisms. As Kant says:

> "Organized beings are thus the only ones in nature which, even if considered in themselves and without a relation to other things, must nevertheless be thought of as possible only as its ends, and which thus first provide objective reality for the concept of an **end** that is not a practical end but an end of **nature**." (5: 375-6)

What is special about organisms, it seems, isn't their supersensible grounding – after all, in a sense, everything in appearance is so grounded. What is special about them is that, in appearing to us as objective wholes on which their parts depend, rather than as mere

aggregates, they force us to consider a determinate supersensible substratum instead of the mere indeterminate negative concept of noumena of the first *Critique*, or the hypothetical and always provisional ground that the necessity of laws demands. We cannot ignore the requirements that biological phenomena impinge onto us.

But these requirements do not seem to posit any radical exceptionality for organisms. This is a greatly contentious matter, but I think that the evidence I have presented so far, against both the causal anomaly and the intelligible grounding routes into autonomy, speak (broadly) in favour of the stream of interpretations represented, among others, by Illetterati, Sustar and Geiger. Mechanical explanation is all-pervasive and the only objective one there is, but the grammar of our biological discourse is unavoidable when judging certain complex phenomena, and it forces us into admitting another order of explanation in nature, one that must be accounted by the supersensible ground of appearances, but always through the relevant mechanical means. Living beings are the one case where we can directly experience a natural kind, a whole that cannot be dismissed as a mere aggregate, since they quite literally reproduce and instantiate the said kind; whereas with other natural kinds, like those of chemistry or geology, we have to make experiments and test hypotheses, only approaching asymptotically whatever underlying laws nature exhibits (Kreines, 2017).

The freedom of human beings allows Kant to impute such absolute causal beginnings to us insofar as it introduces a uniquely different ground from that of the rest of nature. Through our moral awareness, Kant claims, we become acquainted with a binding duty to act in conformity with and for the sake of the moral law, which is the pure *a priori* legislation of our practical reason, as we already saw. This is independent from whatever actually transpires in nature, it is the sole case in which we can legitimately

claim to know what the inner determinations of a supersensible ground must be, and not just what about nature it has to account for – as is the case with organisms. But the sort of causal origin that the actions of living beings may elicit is not qualitatively different from the general metaphysical ground we can posit for all natural kinds, including those that aren't as conspicuous as living beings.

## A moderate takeaway

This may seem to be a rather disappointing conclusion. Kant remains thoroughly anthropocentric in attributing autonomous agency. Organisms cannot attain special causal responsibility over and above that of any other being with a comparatively inner determination, like a turnspit. First of all, because they cannot breach either the Second Analogy nor the legal unity of nature and experience. Moreover, because, even though they demand a supersensible ground to account for their possibility, this ground isn't qualitatively different from the general substrate of nature that accounts for the necessity of empirical laws.

Is that all? I am going to briefly argue that not quite, that there are moderate but practically relevant consequences to be extracted from Kant's discussion of organisms. Consider, for one, a problem that goes back to Fichte, and that Saunders (2016) has recently brought back into the spotlight. If our notion of a rational agent is completely intelligible and pure, only to be found amid noumena, how could we ever know what they look like in experience, bearing in mind that we *only ever* know what goes on at the level of appearances? We may make sense of what it means for us to attain awareness of our being free from a first-personal standpoint, but how do we ever extend this judgment to other people, or, even, how do our very physical, very empirical bodies enter the picture of our free agency?

I claim that Kant's theory of organisms can help us here. The argument would go like this. (i) A free agent is one that has an intelligible ground by which it may act from a moral motive. (ii) If there was a free agent in the world, we would expect it to exhibit rational behaviour to the extent that it is visible, even though this would be insufficient to claim that such an agent is free. (iii) We have to assent to the reality of freedom through our awareness of the moral law (this is disputed by some, but let us grant this). (iv) There are certain beings that exhibit rational behaviour. (v) These beings are humans, and, as such, organisms. (vi) Since humans are organisms, their rational behaviour has to be grounded in an intelligible ground. (vii) Given that we have to assent to there being some free beings, these are the only ones that can be aptly called so.

Note that we aren't inferring transcendental freedom from visible traits, that is strictly impossible. What we find in experience, however, are beings with the traits we would expect from a free being, and, moreover, beings that demand to be treated as intelligibly grounded, as objective wholes. If we weren't organisms, it would be a mere hypothesis that our human peers were expressive of a real feature of the world; since we are, however, we cannot help but explain our possibility through such a ground. Given that experience through the principles of reflective judgment gives us the "locus" for freedom, and practical reason gives us the warrant to assert the reality of freedom, we can rightfully (to the extent of our possible knowledge) judge humans as free beings. Kant's theory of living beings helps make sense of how we would go about finding an intelligibly grounded being in experience.

This, I believe, makes the abyss between human and non-human animals in Kant's philosophy somewhat shallower, if not inexistent. If we judge humans as living beings with a particular ground as rational human beings, we move away from the Cartesian

primacy of the first-person view, and get closer perhaps to an Aristotelian view, where humans are indeed distinct from other animals, but still characterized fundamentally as rational animals.

Finally, for the same reason we cannot help but judge humans as pertaining to the supersensible ground of nature, so it goes for the rest of living beings. This turns moot any sceptical attitudes towards the interest of other organisms eo ipso. There cannot be a significantly higher doubt about the reality of the inner determinations of lizards, snails, dogs or falcons – or, for that matter, oaks and shrubs and mushrooms – than there is about humans. If we are too picky about non humans, and entertain the thought that perhaps they are mere automata, and that their outward behaviours aren't representative of any real ground of nature, we essentially commit to saying as much about humans, if not by the barest added credence of analogy from our perspective (a classically doubtful argument, which tries to make an inference from a sample of one). Kant's commitment to our needing to judge other living beings as expressions of the real ground of nature, coupled with a slightly changed ethical framework, like that of Korsgaard, for instance, could potentially result in a fairly robust account of the interests of other living beings.

> "[...] the characteristic regularities exhibited by an organism are part of the natural order. Such biological laws as the law by which oaks produce acorns and acorns in turn produce oaks are genuine laws of nature, and grasping them is part of what is required if we are to achieve a full understanding of nature's workings" (Ginsborg, 2004: 61)

In conclusion, then, we will probably not find room for biological autonomy in Kant's theory. Though his account of organisms may plausibly stand at the same level as modern accounts of biological autonomy, Kant is too strict about the nature of causality

to claim as much. Anything less than an absolute causal origin, as far as Kant is concerned, is equivalent to the "freedom of a turnspit", ultimately uninteresting and as "naturally necessitated" as any other physical phenomenon. Similarly, though organisms express the legal ground of nature in a uniquely explicit way, this is the same ground that undergirds any other empirical law. However, this conception makes Kant a very sui generis realist about living beings and their inner determination. While our teleological judgments lack objective validity, we are subjectively compelled to judge living beings as really grounded by the supersensible substrate of nature; as such, organisms have privileged credence as members of nature, and they show the way forward in bridging the realms of the empirical and the intelligible. Insofar as we, too, are organisms, and holders of a very special intelligible ground, this way of approaching Kant's theories helps reduce the gap between ourselves and other animals. Yes, according to Kant, we are unique; but that doesn't mean that we can do without our animal nature.