Kant’s Non-Teleological Conception of Purposiveness

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Abstract

In this paper I argue, first, that Kant’s technical definition of purposiveness in § 10 of the Critique of the Power of Judgment is designed to abstract from all forward-looking considerations (teleological, intentional, normative) that accompany the conventional understanding of the term. Kant seeks to establish a strictly backward-looking, etiological notion of purposiveness in order to capture the causal link connecting artifacts with their concepts. I argue, second, that he succeeds. Kant’s etiological conception of purposiveness neither collapses into mechanism, nor smuggles normative considerations in through the backdoor. I frame my discussion by critically engaging Hannah Ginsborg’s reading of § 10—the leading example of a normative interpretation of Kant’s notion of purposiveness.

Keywords: purposiveness, conceptual causality, normativity, Hannah Ginsborg.

1. Introduction

A perennial task for commentators on Kant’s Critique of the Power of Judgment is to explain what Kant means by purposiveness. Kant’s notion of purposiveness is the central term of art in the third Critique: it pertains to virtually all of the book’s major doctrines and, in consequence, holds the key, also, to the vexing problem of the book’s unity. In spite of this centrality, the notion of purposiveness remains poorly understood. This is not altogether surprising. The meaning philosophers associate most closely with the notion of purposiveness—its teleological meaning—is just what Kant hopes to do without. Not only is teleology not an important component part of Kant’s conception of purposiveness, Kant seeks to bar it from his technical definition of the term altogether.¹ This has not been appreciated in the literature: the highly instructive route by which Kant arrives at his definition of purposiveness has remained obscure as has, accordingly, the nature of the technical vocabulary it yields.²

¹ This non-teleological conception of purposiveness is not to be confused with Kant’s doctrine of a purposiveness without purpose in the Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment. The various modifications of purposiveness that Kant proposes over the course of the third Critique—including the one in the Aesthetic—presuppose Kant’s base non-teleological conception.

² Commentators, for the most part, do note the peculiar etiological nature of Kant’s technical conception of purposiveness that I highlight below (see 1.1 and 2.3) but then either fail to note its corresponding non-teleological nature (see 2.3 and 2.5) or, at any rate, to prevent conventional teleological considerations from encroaching on Kant’s technical conception: Konrad Marc-Wogau (Vier Studien zu Kant’s Kritik der Urteilskraft. Uppsala. 1938) acknowledges Kant’s etiological meaning of purposiveness but—driven
Following introductory remarks (see 1.1-1.2), I advocate two related claims. First, I argue, on textual grounds, that Kant seeks to establish a non-teleological, etiological conception of purposiveness as his central technical term in the third Critique (see 2.3). Second, I argue, on philosophical grounds, that this non-teleological conception of purposiveness is successful, and neither collapses into mere mechanism (see 2.4), nor smuggles teleology in through the backdoor (see 2.5). I frame my discussion by critically assessing Hannah Ginsborg’s normative interpretation of Kant’s notion of purposiveness.³ Normativity is the most resilient element of teleological interpretations of Kant’s notion of purposiveness, and Ginsborg’s interpretation is, for that reason, an important test case for my own (see 2.1, 2.2, and 2.5).

³ Ginsborg, op. cit.
1.1 Kant’s Definition of Purposiveness: An Overview

Kant defines what he means by purposiveness with precision early on in the third Critique, in § 10, entitled “On purposiveness in general”\(^4\). Kant there presents purposiveness as his *terminus technicus* for mind/world causality, and, specifically, for *conceptual causality*. Purposiveness, Kant says, is “[…] the causality of a concept with regard to its object […]”\(^5\). To characterize an object as exhibiting purposiveness (or as being purposive, or as a purpose), according to this definition, is to ascribe to the object a certain kind of causal ancestry. It is to make the etiological claim that the object’s concept played a causal role in the object’s coming into being, and, hence, in helping to shape and arrange the object as it is before us. In a first approximation, we may then say that to judge an object purposive, in Kant’s technical sense, is to detect the sort of order in it that can be imparted by a concept.

Kant’s technical definition of purposiveness thus differs from the conventional understanding of the term. Ordinarily, to call an object purposive is to judge it to be directed at, useful for, well-suited to, or intended for an end. It is the reference to an end, or *telos*, in these characterizations that marks the conventional conception of purposiveness as teleological in the broadest sense.\(^6\) The idea of an origin in concepts (be it actual or merely apparent) may well resonate in the background of judgments of purposiveness in this conventional sense, but it hardly exhausts what we mean by them.

If it is not immediately clear, then, just where the difference between Kant’s etiological notion of purposiveness (*being caused by a concept*) and the conventional teleological notion of purposiveness (*being related to an end*) may lie, it is telling that the unusual definition of § 10 is Kant’s considered view of purposiveness in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. The prominently placed definition is the *only* definition of

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\(^5\) KU, AA 05: 220.3-4. “[…] und die Causalität eines Begriffs in Ansehung seines Objects ist die Zweckmäßigkeit (*forma finalis*).”

\(^6\) In a more precise sense, only the relation of being directed at an end is teleological *simpliciter*. The other relations mentioned are further determinations (respectively: functional, valuational, and intentional) of that base relation. Unless otherwise indicated, I use the notion of teleology in the broad sense noted.
purposiveness Kant gives in the entire third Critique\textsuperscript{7,8}, and Kant continuously refers to it throughout the rest of the text.\textsuperscript{9}

1.2 Hannah Ginsborg’s Normative Interpretation of Purposiveness

In her “Kant on Aesthetic and Biological Purposiveness,”\textsuperscript{10} Hannah Ginsborg seeks to minimize the apparent difference between Kant’s technical conception of purposiveness and the conventional conception of purposiveness. On Ginsborg’s view, Kant’s definition of purposiveness in § 10 of the third Critique is inherently teleological, after all—in spite of its etiological focus on concepts as causes. Ginsborg presents her two-pronged argument in terms of an alleged normativity implicit in Kant’s definition. Ginsborg contends, first, that the idea of an object caused by a concept entails that the object caused be intended for an end. It thus entails the normative idea that the object caused conform to the end pursued. She holds, second, that the idea of an object caused by a concept entails that the object caused itself be an end. This is registered in the normative demand that an object caused by a concept conform to the concept that caused it. The idea of an object caused by its concept is thus inseparable from the normative idea that the object caused be as it—by the standard of (i) its intended end\textsuperscript{11} and (ii) its conceptual cause\textsuperscript{12}—ought to be.

I do not think that Ginsborg’s argument is successful. Her attempt to link Kant’s notion of conceptual causality to the normativity of intentional causality (or design) is not convincing; and while there undeniably is a way that any given product of conceptual causality is to be (making it an end of sorts), judging something to be a product of conceptual causality does not require reference to what way that is—and, hence, does not

\textsuperscript{7} Kant’s occasional characterization of purposiveness in terms of lawfulness does not constitute an alternative definition of purposiveness but, rather, highlights the circumstance that the order detected in a judgment of purposiveness is conceptual order (see especially EEKU, AA 20: 217.27-28).

\textsuperscript{8} Kant does, however, on at least three occasions, define the conceptual cause of an object—as opposed to the object itself—as a ‘purpose,’ thereby contradicting the terminology adopted in § 10 (see KU, AA 05: 180.31-2; EEKU, AA 20: 232.16-7; ÜGTP, AA 08: 181.13). But note that this terminological uncertainty about exactly what should be called ‘purpose’ in the causality of a concept with regard to its object evidently presupposes (it does not present an alternative to) Kant’s definition of purposiveness as the causality of a concept with regard to its object.

\textsuperscript{9} See KU, AA 05: 177.20n., 180.131-4, 307.29-30, 367.1-3, 369.33-5, 372.31-3, 393.31, 408.4-6, 454.23-6; EEKU, AA 20: 196.18-20, 217.24-7, 230.22-4; see also KpV, AA 05: 9.2n.

\textsuperscript{10} Ginsborg, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{11} See 2.2, below.

\textsuperscript{12} See 2.5.1, below.
entail a normative assessment of the object in question. Contrary to Ginsborg’s claims, Kant’s *etiological* conception of purposiveness emerges as a fully *non-*normative and *non-*teleological conception.

2. **Normativity**

Ginsborg first detects the normative dimension of Kant’s conception of purposiveness in his account of the purposiveness of nature in the First Introduction to the third *Critique*. She contends that this same normative dimension also informs Kant’s technical definition of purposiveness in § 10. It is not necessary, at this point, to ask whether Ginsborg’s discovery of normativity in Kant’s First Introduction is an accurate reading of that text. All we need to determine in order to get going is what sort of normativity Ginsborg believes to be at work there. The remaining task for the paper will then be to see whether Ginsborg’s conclusion that such normativity is “[…] already implicit in Kant’s initial notion of purposiveness [in § 10]”\(^{13}\), is correct.

2.1 **Normativity in the First Introduction**

Ginsborg originally detects normativity in Kant’s characterization, in the First Introduction to the third *Critique*, of the principle of purposiveness as a principle concerned with the “[…] conformity to law of the contingent […]”\(^{14}\). Kant presents a simple example of this conformity to law in our explanation of the structure of the human eye. When explaining the structure of the eye, we do not rest content to say, merely, that this structure *happens* to coincide with optical laws that are consistent with the possibility of vision. Instead, we judge that these optical laws *govern* the eye’s structure, that the structure is the way it is *in order to* enable vision, and, hence, that the eye “[…] was

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\(^{13}\) Ginsborg, *op. cit.*, 342.

\(^{14}\) EEU, AA 20: 217.27-8. “Denn Zweckmäßigkeit ist eine Gesetzmäßigkeit des Zufälligen als eines solchen.” The above translation of ‘Gesetzmäßigkeit’ as ‘conformity to law’ is Ginsborg’s. I use it in this section in order to present Ginsborg’s normative account of the First Introduction without unnecessary complications. Note, however, that this translation makes a normative interpretation of Kant’s ‘Gesetzmäßigkeit des Zufälligen’—and of the associated conception of purposiveness—virtually inevitable. Since the normativity of Kant’s conception of purposiveness is, at the very least, debatable, the more neutral translation of ‘Gesetzmäßigkeit’ as ‘lawfulness,’ which leaves the matter open, is to be preferred. See also KU, AA 05: 184.2-6.
supposed to be suitable for seeing [...]”15. Kant notes, however, that the principle of such non-accidental conformity between the eye’s structure and natural laws “[...] could not have been drawn from experience [...]” since experience “[...] teaches us only what things are [...]”16, and not how they should be. To detect non-accidental conformity to natural laws is to go beyond a merely descriptive conception of the laws in question, and to see them in a normative light. Thus, according to Ginsborg, what Kant means by the conformity to law of the contingent is really its “[...] conformity to normative law.”17 Whatever the grounds of this attribution of normative force to natural laws may be, the laws, thus construed, now allow us to judge not merely that the contingent object is a certain way, but why (to what end) it is that way, and whether it is as it—by the standard of (i) that end and (ii) those laws—ought to be.

Ginsborg concludes that, since Kant’s notion of a ‘conformity to law of the contingent’ must be understood in these normative terms, and since Kant calls such conformity to law purposiveness18, Kant’s notion of purposiveness in the First Introduction to the third Critique is a normative notion.

2.2 Purposiveness as Conformity to an Intended End

Ginsborg’s presents two arguments intended to connect this normative interpretation of the notion of purposiveness to Kant’s official definition of purposiveness in § 10 of the Critique of the Power of Judgment. The first of these proceeds in two phases.19 In the first phase, Ginsborg argues for a close link between Kant’s technical definition of purposiveness, on the one hand, and intentional causality or design, on the other. Since an object produced intentionally is an object produced with an end in mind, purposiveness as defined in § 10 emerges as a teleological notion. In the second phase, Ginsborg contends that Kant’s technical notion of purposiveness, thus understood, must be given a normative interpretation.

16 EEUU, AA 20: 240.16-7. “[...] welches [Princip] aus der Erfahrung (die da nur lehrt, was die Dinge sind) nicht hat gezogen werden können.”
17 Ginsborg, op. cit., 339.
18 See EEUU, AA 20: 217.28, 228.16-7; KU, AA 05: 184.2-6, 404.27-8
19 Ginsborg, op. cit., 331ff. Ginsborg’s second argument is the topic of 2.5, below.
Ginsborg begins by noting that when Kant defines purposiveness as the causality of a concept with regard to its object, he means to suggest that “[…] the concept of a thing or state of affairs can play a causal role in bringing it about […]”\(^{20}\). In other words, Kant means to suggest that a concept can make a causal “[…] contribution […] to the processes by which change takes place in the spatio-temporal world.”\(^{21}\) Ginsborg does not discuss what grounds Kant may have for endorsing the possibility of such mind/world causality or how we are to imagine it or, indeed, whether the notion makes (Kantian) sense at all.\(^{22}\) Instead, Ginsborg’s main concern is to connect Kant’s notion of conceptual causality (or purposiveness) to the idea of intentional causality (or design)—presumably because this way normativity lies. She explains that a concept is causally efficacious:

[…] whenever a thing or state of affairs is brought about by an intelligent agent in accordance with an intention or design. If a thing is intentionally produced, there is a concept of the thing in the mind of the agent which is antecedent to the thing’s existence and which governs or determines the agent’s activity in producing it.\(^{23}\)

Ginsborg here makes an empirical-psychological observation about the circumstances under which conceptual causality “[…] happens […]”\(^{24}\)—i.e., when and where we locate causally efficacious concepts, namely: antecedent to the existence of their objects and in an intending agent’s mind. Note, however, that this presents intentional causality as, at best, a sufficient (not a necessary) condition for conceptual causality. That is to say, from Ginsborg’s observation that whenever there is intentional causality, there is conceptual causality, the converse (that whenever there is conceptual causality, there is intentional causality) does not follow. Evidently, then, it would be a mistake to conclude that cases in which a concept plays a causal role in the production of its object (i.e., cases of purposiveness, in Kant’s sense) are automatically cases of intentional causality. Non-

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 331.
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
\(^{22}\) See 2.4, below.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
\(^{24}\) Ibid.
intentional conceptual causality remains a distinct logical possibility.\textsuperscript{25} Ginsborg, however, draws just this unwarranted conclusion, and takes her empirical-psychological observation to point not only to design’s sufficiency for Kantian conceptual causality but also to something approaching necessity: “[p]urposiveness, thus far defined, appears to be restricted to products of intentional causality.”\textsuperscript{26}

The very nature of the restriction to which Ginsborg points in her conclusion entails, of course, that even if Kant’s notion of conceptual causality were restricted to intentional causality (it is not),\textsuperscript{27} the notion of conceptual causality as such remains broader in scope. Ginsborg is aware of this, and, in the second phase of her initial take on § 10, seeks to reinforce the conclusion that non-intentional conceptual causality cannot be what Kant has in mind in § 10. It is here that the idea of normativity comes into play. Given the earlier shortcomings, one would expect an argument for the normativity of Kant’s notion of conceptual causality that is independent of the flawed attempt to connect purposiveness with design.\textsuperscript{28} Yet, the argument for the normativity of Kant’s notion of conceptual causality that Ginsborg now presents continues to depend upon the latter, unwarranted result.

Ginsborg concedes that we can readily conceive of non-intentional conceptual causality. She imagines a painter in love who, rather than depict his actual model, always ends up painting “the woman of his obsession”\textsuperscript{29}—\textit{malgrè lui}\textsuperscript{30}—and explains that “[h]ere the concept of the woman is causally efficacious in producing her likeness […]”\textsuperscript{31}, even as it fails to influence the creation of her portrait intentionally. Ginsborg notes that such an unintended, sub-conscious conceptual influence is not, however, what we call design because it fails to be appropriately normative. As she puts it, “[f]or the characteristic causality of design it is needed, not just that the concept influence the

\textsuperscript{25} Kant characterizes his conception of purposiveness in § 10 as \textit{formal} precisely in order to distinguish it from \textit{real} or \textit{empirical} purposiveness—i.e., purposiveness as encountered in the actual production of artifacts—which, as a contingent matter of fact, presupposes intention. See, e.g., KU, AA 05: 364.23-5.

\textsuperscript{26} Ginsborg, \textit{op. cit.}, \textit{ibid.}, 332, my emphasis.

\textsuperscript{27} See 2.3, below.

\textsuperscript{28} As we will see, Ginsborg does have such an argument; see 2.5, below.

\textsuperscript{29} Ginsborg, \textit{op. cit.}, \textit{ibid.}, 342.

\textsuperscript{30} A less romantic version of this idea can be found in Emile Zola’s \textit{Thérèse Raquin}, where Laurent, aspiring artist and haunted murderer of his mistress’ husband, discovers, to his horror, that the features of his victim have made it onto all of his canvasses. Zola, Emile: \textit{Thérèse Raquin}. Paris. 1979, 230-2.

\textsuperscript{31} Ginsborg, \textit{op. cit., ibid.}. 
painter’s behavior but that it govern it normatively.”

Ginsborg concludes from this that, since design entails normativity—and since purposiveness entails design—“[…] the idea of normativity is already implicit in Kant’s initial notion of purposiveness [as defined in § 10]”.

Ginsborg’s argument for the normative dimension of Kant’s definition of purposiveness in § 10 thus rests flatly on the earlier ill-founded conclusion that Kant restricts purposiveness to intentional causality. As a result, Ginsborg’s first argument for the connection between normativity and Kant’s notion of purposiveness fails.

Yet, in spite of these shortcomings, something does seem undeniably right about the attempt to connect Kant’s notion of a ‘causality of a concept with regard to its object’ to the idea of normativity. As it turns out, it is Ginsborg’s tendency to frame this point in terms of intention and design that clouds the issue.

We get a better sense of what Ginsborg may be on to by considering, again, her case of the obsessed painter—precisely because this is a case of a concept’s unintended, sub-conscious influence on the production of its object, and not a case of design. Let us, moreover, follow Ginsborg’s assumption that it is indeed the concept of the woman that influences the painter (as opposed to, say, the painter’s memorized image of the woman). Ginsborg contends that this sort of sub-conscious psychological influence does not involve normativity. This is, presumably, because she believes that for this influence to be a normatively governed process, “[t]he concept has to function as a rule which represents to the painter how the painting ought to be.” But this view of the production of the painting is altogether too agent-centric. For, even the non-intentional production of the woman’s likeness is subject to correctness conditions imposed by “the concept of the woman”, provided that the concept does indeed influence the process, and provided that the product is indeed its (i.e., that concept’s) object. The point is readily generalized. Any causal process on which a concept exerts a purported causal influence, and whose product is the concept’s object, is subject to correctness conditions imposed by that concept—whether this process occurs in deliberate pursuit of an end or not. Normativity, indeed,

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., my emphasis.
35 Ibid.
36 On this condition, see 2.5.2, below.
seems to be built right into the notion of a concept that helps engender its object. Since Kant defines purposiveness as the causality of a concept with regard to its object, it appears that in Kant’s technical definition of purposiveness we get normativity for free. Thus begins the second, stronger line of Ginsborg’s argument. Before investigating these matters further (2.5), it is high time we consider what Kant actually says about purposiveness in § 10.

2.3 Kant’s Definition of Purposiveness

2.3.1 Concepts as Causes

§ 10 of the Critique of the Power of Judgment is divided into two short paragraphs of four and five sentences, respectively. Kant’s definition of purposiveness is contained in the first three sentences of the first paragraph, which are, for that reason, the main focus here. Kant begins his account, following a prefatory remark about the transcendental nature of his definition (more on which in 2.3.2, below), by defining the notion of a purpose. Kant stipulates that he will call an object ‘purpose’ whose concept is accorded an etiological role in the object’s production:

[...] a purpose is thus the object of a concept insofar as the latter [the concept] is regarded as the cause of the former [the object] (the real ground of its [the object’s] possibility). (KU, AA 05: 220.1-3)

The language of purposes thus comes into play when a concept is considered not merely in terms of its representational ties to its object but as a cause or real ground:

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37 The fourth sentence of the first paragraph contains Kant’s definition of pleasure. The sentence is not relevant for an account of Kant’s technical conception of purposiveness since Kant insists, as we will see, that his notion of purposiveness abstract from “[...] anything empirical such as the feeling of pleasure [...]” (KU, AA 05: 219.32). Kant’s appeal to pleasure in the fourth sentence has, instead, to do with Kant’s attempt to tie his technical conception of purposiveness to his aesthetic theory—a topic that need not concern us here. The second paragraph of § 10 is also beyond the scope of an account of Kant’s technical definition of purposiveness (a point sometimes missed in the literature; see, e.g., Guyer, op. cit., 188; Ginsborg, op. cit., 332f.). In it, Kant addresses the explanatory versatility of that definition, and thus presupposes the definition as already understood—he does not add to it.

38 “[...] so ist Zweck der Gegenstand eines Begriffs, sofern dieser als die Ursache von jenem (der reale Grund seiner Möglichkeit) angesehen wird [...]”.
Where thus not merely the cognition of an object but the object itself (its form or its existence) as an effect is thought of as possible only through a concept of the latter, there one thinks of a purpose. (KU, AA 05: 220.4-7)\(^{39}\)

Kant’s name for this peculiar kind of causal relation between a concept and its object is *purposiveness*: “[…] and the causality of a concept with regard to its object is purposiveness […]”\(^{40}\). Thus, in the first two sentences of § 10, Kant gives complementary definitions of ‘purpose’ (as *an object caused by its concept*) and of ‘purposiveness’ (as *the causality of a concept with regard to its object*).\(^{41}\)

In the third sentence, Kant complicates matters by going beyond the simple bipartite (cause [concept]/effect [object]) structure of the causality of concepts that he has sketched thus far. Kant now claims that where a concept is considered as playing a causal role in the production of its object, a *representation of the effect* precedes the object’s cause:

> The representation of the effect is here the determining ground of its cause, and precedes the latter. (KU, AA 05: 220.8-9)\(^{42}\)

Kant thus presents *three separate relata* as characteristic of conceptual causality, no longer just *two*: (1) a *representation* of the effect, (2) a *cause* of the effect, (3) the *effect*. It is initially unclear, whether this new account is supposed to be understood as a further *definition*—this time of the notion ‘causality of a concept with regard to its object’ (thereby effectively replacing the earlier bi-partite *definiens* in Kant’s definition of purposiveness with a new, tri-partite one)—or a looser sort of characterization. More immediately troubling, depending on the interpretation we give to the three *relata*, at

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\(^{39}\) “Wo also nicht etwa bloß die Erkenntniß von einem Gegenstande, sondern der Gegenstand selbst (die Form oder Existenz desselben) als Wirkung nur als durch einen Begriff von der letztern möglich gedacht wird, da denkt man sich einen Zweck.”

\(^{40}\) KU, AA 05: 220.3-4. “[…] und die Causalität eines Begriffs in Ansehung seines Objects ist die Zweckmäßigkeit.”

\(^{41}\) It is worth stressing that Kant’s characterization here is evidently simplified. A concept is, at best, a *causal factor* in the coming into being of its object. Kant’s simplification is, however, very much on purpose. As we will see, Kant’s aim in § 10 is precisely to set aside other factors in order to highlight the conceptual factor. When, in the following, I speak of a concept ‘causing’ its object, it should thus be borne in mind that this is shorthand, but in the spirit of Kant’s presentation.

\(^{42}\) “Die Vorstellung der Wirkung ist hier der Bestimmungsgrund ihrer Ursache und geht vor der letztern vorher.”
least two competing readings of Kant’s third sentence ensue. I sort out these two readings in the present section, and, in the next (2.3.2), consider what significance this pivotal sentence may have for Kant’s definitional project in § 10.

On perhaps the most straightforward reading of the third sentence of § 10, Kant takes the representation of the effect to be the object’s concept. Kant’s point, then, would be that where a concept is considered to be the cause of its object, that concept is also considered to be determining intermediate objects (i.e., “[…] its [the object’s] cause[s]”43) involved in the object’s (i.e., “[…] the effect[’s]”44) production. Thus, if I want to build a kitchen cabinet, my concept (‘kitchen cabinet’) determines that I will need wood and woodworking tools to build it. My concept is then not only regarded as the real ground of any resulting cabinet but as a determining ground of the various objects causally involved in the cabinet’s production.

Whatever its common-sense appeal, however, this reading lacks textual plausibility.45 If Kant’s point really concerned two types of cause and their logical interrelation (i.e., if Kant’s point were that an object’s conceptual cause must also be considered the logical or determining ground of that object’s physical cause), Kant could have hardly expected to make this point successfully by mentioning just one cause (“[…] its cause […]”46), and without qualification, at that. He could not have expected this, since the type of cause or real ground of an object that is ostensibly under consideration in the opening of § 10 is the cause of an effect of the causality of concepts—hence, a concept. In the context of a discussion of concepts as causes, and in the absence of any explicit consideration to the contrary, the only plausible referent for the expression ‘its cause’ is an object’s conceptual cause. Still, it is certainly not impossible that Kant, at the very heart of his short characterization of conceptual causes, equivocates on the notion under investigation in order to suggest that the cause of an effect of the causality of concepts is in fact a physical cause. It is, however, highly implausible that he would do this at the cost of turning the object’s concept into a mere logical ground—devoid of

43 KU, AA 05: 220.8.
44 Ibid.
45 Some support for it, however, can be drawn from Kant’s reference to purposiveness at KU, AA 05: 369.33-5.
46 KU, AA 05: 220.8.
causal efficacy altogether—at the very moment when his explicit aim is to highlight that concept’s causality.47

If ‘cause’ in Kant’s expression ‘the determining ground of [the object’s] cause’ thus names the object’s concept, then the ‘representation of the effect’ that (we are told) precedes and determines this cause must differ from the object’s concept. A second and more plausible reading of the third sentence of § 10 is, then, that by the representation of the effect that precedes and determines an object’s conceptual cause, Kant means the guiding idea, goal or intention behind that object’s production. What makes an intention the determining ground of an object’s conceptual cause would be that it helps recruit the concept (the cause) whose object (the effect) has the potential (through its properties) of engendering the intended state of affairs. E.g., if the state of the world I intend to bring about is one in which I find storage for the china in my kitchen, the representation of this state (together with relevant background information) helps determine the concept ‘kitchen cabinet’ as a concept the existence of whose object (a kitchen cabinet) has the potential of making the represented state real.

On this reading, too, Kant would be guilty of an equivocation. The ‘effect’ in Kant’s expression ‘the representation of the effect’ here does double-duty as it refers both to the object that is to be produced and to the desired state that the object’s existence is to make possible. But, unlike the former equivocation, which has Kant slide between the two fundamentally different types of cause (conceptual and physical) whose very distinction is at issue in the opening of § 10, the latter equivocation is relatively benign. Kant would fail to distinguish between the existence of an object and the existence of a state of affairs, in a context where this distinction does not matter very much. I conclude that, given (1) the problems of the first reading, (2) the inherent textual plausibility and relatively minor problem of the second reading, as well as (3) the absence of plausible

47 A variation of this reading that avoids this problem is that by ‘determining ground’ Kant does not mean a logical ground but, consistent with rationalist usage, a kind of cause. Continuing our assumption that by ‘the representation of the effect’ Kant means the object’s concept, that concept would then be a cause of its object (i.e., a real ground) precisely because it is, in the first instance, a cause of its object’s physical cause (i.e., a determining ground). As a determining ground, the concept would then, however, be a cause of an object other than its own. The problem with this, as we will see in 2.5, below, is that the notion of a concept’s causality in regard of an object other than its own no longer treats that concept as a cause qua representational entity. But where the representational nature of the concept is no longer at issue, the concept cannot be a determining ground. Thanks to Desmond Hogan for bringing this alternative reading to my attention.
alternatives to these interpretations, the second reading of the third sentence of § 10 is the one we must adopt.

The complication that Kant adds to the simple bipartite (cause [concept]/effect [object]) structure of the causality of concepts in the third sentence of § 10 is, accordingly, that whenever a concept is considered causally efficacious with regard to its object, this causal efficacy is itself construed as embedded in the context of the intention an agent pursues in making the concept’s object real. The production of an object through conceptual causality thus involves not only (i) a concept (as the real ground of its object) but (ii) an intention (as the determining ground of that concept). Note that, if we were to take this second, intentional component as definitional of the causality of a concept with regard to its object, Kant would be supplying just the sort of necessary condition for conceptual causality that Ginsborg was hoping to discover. Ginsborg’s contention that Kant’s definition of purposiveness involves a normative dimension could, then, readily be established along her original lines, presented in 2.2, above. Accordingly, having established the meaning of the third sentence of § 10, we must now consider its significance in order to see whether it supports Ginsborg’s account. Specifically, we must determine whether Kant’s characterization of conceptual causality in the third sentence of § 10 has the force of a definition.

2.3.2 Transcendental Determinations

It would be a mistake to understand the third sentence of § 10 as providing not only a sufficient but also a necessary condition for conceptual causality. While Kant’s sentence does suggest a strong connection between conceptual causality and intentionality, it is critical that we place the sentence in its proper context before drawing conclusions about the nature of the connection asserted. That context is provided by the very first (and most important) thing Kant says about his definition of purposiveness in § 10, namely, that it explains “[…] what a purpose is […]”—and what purposiveness is—“[…] according to its transcendental determinations (without presupposing anything
empirical such as the feeling of pleasure) […]”⁴⁸. Kant notes that one gives a 
transcendental definition of concepts “[…] when one has cause to suspect that they stand 
in relation to the pure faculty of cognition a priori […]”⁴⁹. The suggestion in § 10 is, 
then, that we need a transcendental definition of the concept of purposiveness because we 
have cause to suspect that this concept stands in relation to the new faculty of cognition a 
priori that Kant introduces in the third Critique: the reflecting power of judgment. To 
give this definition is to prepare the empirical concept of purposiveness for use in a 
transcendental context, and, hence, to strip it off all unduly empirical connotations.

Kant’s characterization of his definitional project as transcendental thus reveals a 
marked dialectic between the first and third sentence of § 10. In the first sentence, Kant 
insists on the transcendental nature of his definition of purposiveness in order to stress 
that the definition abstracts from contingent circumstances surrounding the causal 
efficacy of concepts. In the third sentence, Kant tells us what those contingent 
circumstances are—foremost among them, the fact that the causal efficacy of concepts is 
encountered in the context of a will’s intentional agency. Accordingly, the third sentence 
of § 10, far from suggesting that Kant’s technical definition of purposiveness must be 
understood in terms of intentionality, suggests just the opposite. Given that Kant’s 
technical definition of purposiveness is concerned with the notion’s transcendental 
determinations, it deliberately abstracts from the intentional aspects surrounding 
conceptual causality, which (the third sentence reminds us) are its empirical 
determinations. On this interpretation, any attempt to derive normativity from the 
intentional dimension of conceptual causality that Kant mentions in the third sentence of 
§ 10 necessarily fails—for the simple reason that Kant mentions that dimension precisely 
in order to exclude it from his technical understanding of purposiveness.

That this is indeed the dialectic of the opening of § 10—that by abstracting from 
“[…] anything empirical, such as the feeling of pleasure […]”⁵⁰ Kant presents a 
definition of purposiveness that abstracts from the intentional dimension of the

⁴⁸ KU, AA 05: 219.31-220.1. “Wenn man, was ein Zweck sei, nach seinen transscendentalen 
Bestimmungen (ohne etwas Empirisches, dergleichen das Gefühl der Lust ist, vorauszusetzen) erklären will 
[…]”.
braucht, eine transzendentale Definition zu versuchen, wenn man Ursache hat zu vermuten, daß sie mit 
dem reinen Erkenntnßvermögen a priori in Verwandtschaft stehen.”
⁵⁰ KU, AA 05: 219.32.
production of artifacts altogether—is clear, given Kant’s account of the sensible determination of the will.\textsuperscript{51} For Kant, a sensibly (heteronomously) determined will desires a state of affairs in virtue of anticipated pleasurable effects.\textsuperscript{52} To satisfy the desire for this state of affairs (and reap the pleasurable effects) is the agent’s will—i.e., her end or intention. Bringing about the object (or objects) that would make the state in question a reality is the agent’s means to that intended end. Attaining the means, in turn, is made possible through the adoption of a technical-practical rule\textsuperscript{53} that recommends an appropriate object: If you want state of affairs $x$, produce object $y$.\textsuperscript{54} The satisfaction of a desire to stay dry, for instance, is the intention behind—hence, the rationale underlying the adoption of a technical-practical rule that recommends—building a roof over one’s head.

When Kant explains that his technical definition of purposiveness considers purposiveness “[…] without presupposing anything empirical, such as the feeling of pleasure […]”\textsuperscript{55}, he means that his definition abstracts from the anticipation of pleasure that constitutes the empirical context in which concepts become causally efficacious (by figuring in the consequents of technical practical rules). Accordingly, Kant’s non-empirical, transcendental definition abstracts from the desire in the service of which a concept’s causal efficacy ordinarily stands. Since the satisfaction of a desire is, for Kant, the intention behind an object’s production, it follows that Kant’s non-empirical, transcendental definition abstracts from the intention behind the object’s production altogether.\textsuperscript{56}

Kant’s transcendental definition of purposiveness is, then, carefully designed to exclude the intentional dimension of the causality of a concept with regard to its object. And it excludes more than that. By systematically abstracting from the end pursued in the production of an object, Kant’s transcendental conception of purposiveness excludes a whole range of conventional meanings of the notion of purposiveness. It excludes: (1) the

\textsuperscript{51} See, e.g., KpV, AA 05: 21-22.
\textsuperscript{52} See KpV, AA 05: 22.16.
\textsuperscript{53} See KU, AA 05: 173.30.
\textsuperscript{54} Concepts that are considered causally efficacious with respect to their objects can then be understood, more precisely, as concepts that appear in the consequents of technical propositions adopted by sensibly determined wills.
\textsuperscript{55} KU, AA 05: 219.32-220.1.
\textsuperscript{56} See also KU, AA 05: 182.1-6.
properly *teleological* idea that a purposive object be *directed at* an end;\(^{57}\) (2) the *functional* idea that a purposive object be *good* or *useful for* an end; (3) the *valuational* idea that a purposive object be *good* at being good for an end; (4) the *normative* idea that, in light of its end, a purposive object be as it *ought* to be.

Thus purged of all *forward-looking* concerns with an object’s propensity as a means to the end of (desired) *effects*, Kant’s notion of purposiveness as the causality of a concept with regard to its object emerges as an unflinchingly *backward-looking*\(^ {58}\) notion—its sole concern is with an object’s *causal ancestry*. To judge an object purposive, in this backward-looking sense, far from being a full-blooded judgment about its utility in an economy of ends, instead makes the oddly anodyne point that the object’s concept played a causal role in the object’s coming into being. Thus stripped off pedestrian connotations, Kant’s etiological conception of purposiveness is, emphatically, a critical philosopher’s term of art—tailor-made for its use in Kant’s most recent *a priori* principle—the *transcendental principle of purposiveness*.

Before considering whether Kant in fact succeeds in establishing an *entirely* backward-looking, non-teleological conception of purposiveness—or whether residual *normative* life-blood animates the sparse logic of his technical vocabulary—a further question, posed forcefully by the idea of a backward-looking conception of purposiveness, must now be addressed: does the idea of a concept *causing* its object make any (Kantian) sense at all?

### 2.4 Mental Causation

In discussing the idea of a ‘causality of concepts’ or of a concept’s causal role in the production of its object, Kant does not propose to provide a philosophical analysis of the suggested causal link between concepts and events in the physical world. Such an analysis would, on Kant’s view, be impossible.\(^ {59}\) Very roughly, according to Kant’s *Paralogisms* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, concept-involving psychological states occur in inner sense alone, and, therefore, cannot be located in space. But, according to

\(^{57}\) See n. 6, above.

\(^{58}\) Thanks to Allison Simmons for helpful discussions of this terminology.

\(^{59}\) For a recent, forceful defense of this position, see Kenneth R. Westphal: *Kant’s Transcendental Realism*. Cambridge. 2004, 54n, 229ff.
the Analogies of the Critique of Pure Reason, determine causal judgments can only concern both temporally and spatially identifiable substances interacting with one another. It follows that, on Kant’s view, we can make no determinate causal judgments about—hence cannot give an empirical account of—the efficacy of concept-involving psychological states in the physical world. This is not to deny the possibility of deterministic mind-world causality. It is to deny that, were such determinism to be true, we could know or explain that fact. On theoretical grounds, Kant thus remains agnostic about the causal efficacy of concept-involving psychological states in the physical world. The concept of a causality of concepts is, accordingly, what Kant later calls a problematic concept or a concept for which “[…] no theoretical grounds can be given to determine whether an object corresponds to it […]”.

In spite of this peculiar theoretical status, the concept of a causality of concepts does play an important role in empirical cognition: without the notion that our plans, schemes or concepts can be translated into realities, we would not be able to make sense of even the simplest cases of intentional human behavior. The notion of intentional agency itself would be meaningless. The idea that concept-involving psychological states have causal efficacy in the material world is, then, indispensable for our understanding of ourselves as agents and of that considerable part of reality we consider shaped by ourselves. This indispensability means that, however problematic the concept of a causality of concepts may be, it functions as what Kant, in the Teleology, calls a regulative concept. A regulative concept, in the sense adopted there, is a concept that, although employed beyond the limits of its empirically legitimate use, nonetheless does considerable cognitive service, as it opens up areas of empirical research that would otherwise remain foreclosed. For instance, although considering organisms in functional terms goes well beyond the empirically legitimate use of our function vocabulary,

60 See KU, AA 05: 360.21, 397.8.
61 See Westphal, op. cit., 62n.
62 If Kant’s claims in the transcendental deduction of the principle of purposiveness are correct, it plays an even more fundamental transcendental role.
63 Conceptual causality is a necessary condition of intentional causality.
64 See KU, AA 05: 375.19.
65 Kant, of course, argues at great length in the Teleology that the concept of a ‘natural purpose’ is a concept that we bring to organisms legitimately. But this legitimacy is not empirical since such judgments are a priori reflecting (teleological) judgments, and rest on the transcendental principle of purposiveness. The regulative use of the concept of a ‘natural purpose’ (and in its wake the use of
function talk opens up areas of biological investigation that would be unavailable on a strictly mechanistic conception of the natural world. In the same way, while regarding physical effects as caused by concept-involving psychological states goes beyond the empirically legitimate use of the concept of cause, it does open up areas of cultural, sociological and every-day discourse that would otherwise be uninhabitable.

By defining purposiveness in a backward-looking sense as the causality of a concept with regard to its object, Kant thus assigns the terminological top-spot in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to a concept that, at least in its ordinary employment (i.e., so far as concept-involving psychological states and events in the physical world are concerned), is *problematic* and of merely *regulative* use. The philosophically intriguing question this raises is, naturally, what Kant hopes to accomplish with this concept in the third *Critique*. For the purposes of this essay, however, I will not be concerned with the philosophical significance of Kant’s terminology.

### 2.5 The Causality of Concepts

We saw at the end of 2.2 that there is a perfectly straightforward sense in which normativity becomes relevant to Kant’s definition of purposiveness in § 10. The fact that Kant defines purposiveness as the causality of a concept with regard to *its* object seems to build the idea of normativity right into his account. The notion of a concept causing its object certainly implies more than a merely causal link between concept and object: it implies a representational link between the two. Given this coupling of causal and representational dimensions, it would seem that Kant’s conception of purposiveness *cannot* be entirely backward-looking. Even if the notion abstracts from concerns with the ends pursued in conceptual causality, there would seem to remain—at its core—an appeal to a concept’s irreducibly forward-looking determination of the specific sort of thing its

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function vocabulary in biological discourse) is an extrapolation from this legitimate transcendental deployment in *a priori* reflecting (teleological) judgments (see KU, AA 05: 377.10-6). For Kant, the use of function vocabulary in our discourse on biological phenomena is, thus, either transcendently necessitated or merely regulative—it does not rest on empirical grounds. One might think that function vocabulary is thus empirically legitimate only in the case of human artifacts. But the point of the present paragraph is that in the case of human artifacts, too, function vocabulary (insofar as it cannot be divorced from the idea of conceptual causes) ultimately lacks empirical legitimacy. Both in the case of artifacts, and in the derivative case of organisms, function vocabulary thus rests on an empirically unwarrantable application of the notion of cause.
object is *supposed* to be. If Kant’s technical conception of purposiveness did indeed entail an appeal to the normative constraint a concept’s content places upon the object caused, then Ginsborg’s conclusion, that “[…] the idea of normativity is already implicit in Kant’s initial notion of purposiveness [as defined in § 10]”\(^{66}\), would be unassailable.

### 2.5.1 Purposiveness as Conformity to a Conceptual Cause

Ginsborg’s second, stronger argument explores this line of thought.\(^{67}\) She begins by distinguishing two separate aspects of the normative hold a concept may have on the coming into being of an object. An object may, in the first place, be *subject* to a concept’s normative constraint. Ginsborg suggests that this is the case provided a concept plays a causal role in the object’s coming into being.\(^{68}\) But she points out that it is a separate matter altogether whether the object thus caused *satisfies* the normative constraint in question. This is the case only if the object caused is, moreover, the one the causally efficacious concept represents.

To support the idea that these two aspects of a concept’s normative hold on the coming into being of an object really are distinct, Ginsborg gives the example of a potter who sets out to make a certain type of vase, but fails. Ginsborg explains that the resulting misshapen vase is an effect of the causality of a concept since the potter throws it “[…] with a concept in mind […]”\(^{69}\). She denies, however, that the causally efficacious concept in question represents the *de facto* outcome of the potter’s foundering efforts (i.e., she denies that the potter’s concept was the concept of a misshapen vase).\(^{70}\) But if the misshapen vase is *not* the effect of the concept ‘misshapen vase’ (nor of any other possibly intervening concept, as was the case in Ginsborg’s example of the love-struck painter)—yet if it *is* an effect of the causality of a concept—then it must be the effect of the potter’s concept of a shapely vase. There is, then, a discrepancy (all too familiar to the would-be artist) between the effect *represented* (a shapely vase) and the effect *caused* (a misshapen vase)—the latter remaining painfully *subject* to the normative constraint of the former, even as it sadly fails to *satisfy* that constraint.

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\(^{66}\) Ginsborg, *op. cit.*, 342.

\(^{67}\) See *ibid.*, 343ff.

\(^{68}\) As we saw, Ginsborg also thinks that a designer must be conscious of that role; see 2.2, above.


\(^{70}\) See *ibid.*, 343.
With this distinction in place, Ginsborg turns to Kant’s definition of purposiveness as the causality of a concept with regard to its object. She points out that the case of the potter is not covered by Kant’s definition. The concept of a shapely vase that the potter employed, although causally implicated in generating the disappointing result, “[…] does not have ‘causality in respect of its object’ since its object is not in fact produced […]”\(^{71}\). Since the careless ceramicist’s vase is subject to, but does not satisfy, the causally efficacious concept’s normative constraint, the vase, although an effect of the causality of a concept, is not an effect of purposiveness as Kant defines it.

Ginsborg’s claim that the potter’s sputtering creative effort is \textit{not} an instance of the causality of a concept with regard to its object (as opposed to, say, an instance of the causality of a concept with regard to its object that merely was impeded)—but that it nevertheless \textit{is} an instance of conceptual causality—entails that there are \textit{two} ways in which a concept can be a cause: a concept can either cause (i) its object or (ii) objects \textit{other} than its own. In other words, there are distinct conceptual causalities for creative success and for creative failure. If this interpretation were correct, then Kant’s aim in defining purposiveness in § 10 would be to distinguish these two forms of conceptual causality from each other, and to reserve the name ‘purposiveness’ for the former alone. Since, in the purposive sort of conceptual causality (but not in the non-purposive sort), the object caused is not only subject to but \textit{satisfies} its causally efficacious concept’s normative constraint, it follows that to judge an object purposive, in Kant’s sense, involves an irreducibly “[…] evaluative claim […]”\(^{72}\) that the object is as it is (by the standard of its conceptual cause) \textit{supposed} to be.

Ginsborg’s conception of purposiveness as an \textit{evaluative} notion is problematic, from the point of view of my interpretation, because, on her conception, a judgment of purposiveness makes \textit{substantive} reference to the content of the concept judged to be causally efficacious. A judgment of purposiveness determines (i) what the concept’s content tells us about \textit{how} an object caused by it is supposed to be, and (ii) whether a given object purportedly caused by the concept really is \textit{that} way. In the terminology adopted earlier, this substantive appeal to a causally efficacious concept’s

\(^{71}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 345, my emphasis.  
\(^{72}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 344.
representational content is inherently forward-looking, as it looks toward objects (to be) effected by the concept as end-states. If judgments of purposiveness really did involve this appeal, then my contention that Kant’s notion of purposiveness is strictly backward-looking, non-teleological and non-normative would have to be rejected.

2.5.2 The Nature of Conceptual Causality

But Ginsborg’s argument is flawed as it moves from the straightforward idea that the causality of a concept with regard to its object may be thwarted by intervening causes to the unwarranted idea that a concept’s causal efficacy may somehow cease to be causality of a concept with regard to its object altogether. Contrary to Ginsborg’s suggestion, there is only one form of conceptual causality: the causality of a concept with regard to its object. The proper contrast to Kant’s causality of a concept with regard to its object is not another form of conceptual causality: it is non-conceptual causality, or mechanism. Once this is realized, it is easy to see that Kant’s technical account of purposiveness, in distinguishing conceptual from non-conceptual causality, entails no substantive, forward-looking appeal to a causally efficacious concept’s representational content. Normativity, as we will see, still gets an honorary mention in Kant’s account of purposiveness, but it does not do any philosophical work.

In order to appreciate this, let us consider the idea of a concept that causes an object other than its own in more detail. Ginsborg’s example of the hapless potter has certain limitations (for one, compared with the time of kraters and amphorae, potters today take a less conceptual, more free-wheeling approach to the wheel). An example of rule-following in which an agent implements a well-defined concept or, better yet, a set of step-by-step instructions might thus serve us better. And since the point at issue is a certain type of failure of such implementation—a type that so often stalks us in the kitchen—a culinary example will do well. Thus, I may follow a cake-recipe, and yet earn nothing but doughy rewards instead of the fluffy wholesomeness my pastry book promised. In such a case there is, then, a discrepancy between the effect represented and the effect caused of just the kind we are interested in. Do such discrepancies call for a more accommodating form of conceptual causality than Kant has on offer—one that explains how concepts can cause objects they do not represent?
Consider the following three explanations of my cake calamity: (1) The recipe was flawed. Clearly, this explanation does not mean that the recipe I followed led to a result other than the one it represents. To the contrary, it means that there is a discrepancy between the recipe the author of my pastry book meant to put into print and the recipe that actually got printed, where the latter led to just the result it (however inadvertently) does represent—a doughy cake. (2) I was sloppy. On this scenario, the recipe is without fault and I am to blame (I may have been leaving out certain steps, or substituting others for unwitting inventions of my own, or both). Note, however, that this still does not mean that my pastry book’s recipe caused an effect other than the one it represents. Instead, my sloppiness effectively changed the recipe. Whether I was merely following the actual recipe with little precision or was acting as though I were following a different recipe with great precision—on neither construal is the resulting cake the unmediated effect of the steps given in my book. (3) The oven did not reach the temperature it indicated. On this scenario, the world is to blame, and yet the analysis of my mishap remains essentially the same as the previous one: failing to implement the recommendations of the recipe (even if through no fault of my own) either changes the recipe or, at any rate, thwarts the original recipe’s causal influence on the process.

In dealing with cases of a discrepancy between effect represented and effect caused we thus consider as possible explanations either that the token of the concept that was employed contained a flaw, that the agent was incompetent, or that the world did not cooperate (or a combination of these). These explanations invoke intervening causes, issuing in (potentially severe) copying errors or translation mistakes, in order to explain the discrepancy at hand. We do not consider as a possible explanation—but would have to countenance it if Ginsborg were right—that all in fact went well (i.e., that the token of the concept was the correct one, that the agent did as she was supposed to do, that the world cooperated), and that, in spite of all this, a different form of conceptual causality kicked in by which the concept helped generate an object other than its own. We do not dismiss this scenario as an explanation simply because, as a matter of contingent fact, such a thing does not happen. We dismiss it as an explanation of how a concept helps cause an object because we cannot conceive of this as a case of the causal efficacy of a concept qua concept. A regularity-analysis of causation teaches, of course, that random
and unprecedented consequents are always *conceivable* for a given causal antecedent. But a regularity-analysis does not have the same kind of purchase on this sort of case as it has on others. *Pace* Hume\textsuperscript{73}, in the case of the causality of a concept the effect very much *is* contained in or prefigured by—namely, *represented* by—its cause. An instance of the causality of a concept in which all goes well (i.e., concept-token, agent and world cooperate), and yet the concept helps bring into existence an object *other* than the one it represents—while not inconceivable on a regularity account—cannot conceivably be an instance of the causality of a concept *qua* concept or representational entity.\textsuperscript{74}

I conclude that the *causality of a concept* just is the *causality of a concept with regard to its object*. To consider a concept’s causal efficacy *qua* bearer of representational content is to consider the circumstances under which *that content* becomes reality. By contrast, the idea of a concept that mysteriously generates an effect it does *not* represent not only does not explain very much, it effectively treats the object as the effect of a *non*-representational and, therefore, *non*-conceptual form of causality.

At this point, one may wonder, however, how my criticism of Ginsborg’s claim that foundering design efforts must be excluded from the purview of purposive causality can possibly help support a *non*-teleological interpretation of Kant’s conception of purposiveness. My criticism of Ginsborg’s claim is a rejection of her idea that objects may fail to *satisfy*—but nevertheless remain *subject* to—a causally efficacious concept’s normative constraint. If conceptual causality indeed *just is* the causality of a concept with regard to *its* object, then the point at which an object truly fails to satisfy its causally efficacious concept’s normative constraint (wherever precisely that point may be) must be the point at which it fails to be the effect of that concept (hence subject to its constraint) altogether. In denying that foundering design efforts are instances of purposiveness, Ginsborg thus mistakes cases in which an object *fails to satisfy fully* its


\textsuperscript{74}One may imagine a scenario in which my attempts to produce an *F* invariably produce a *G*, and in which, mastering this odd discrepancy, I set out to produce an *F* whenever I in fact want a *G*. Is the *content* of my concept of *F* then not directly and causally linked to the existence of an object *other* than its own? No. This is, after all, not a case in which all goes well. Indeed, we cannot describe the case without assuming some kind of mistranslation (however systematic) of *F*-instructions into *G*-instructions, hence, some kind of intervening *non*-conceptual cause that scrambles the original message and prevents its implementation. The very formulation of the scenario thus presupposes that a conceptual cause, *qua* concept, causes *its* object. Thanks, once again, to Des Hogan for raising the point.
causally efficacious concept’s normative constraint for cases in which it fully fails to satisfy that constraint. She employs a maximalist conception of satisfaction where a minimalist conception would have been in order. The potter’s misshapen vase, after all, is still a vase: it accordingly does satisfy its causally efficacious concept’s normative constraint (to a degree), and, therefore, is an instance of the causality of a concept with regard to its object. Yet, even a minimalist conception of satisfaction is a conception of satisfaction. My interpretation thus only seems to reinforce Ginsborg’s most basic contention—that Kant’s technical conception of purposiveness is irreducibly normative. On my view, as on hers, Kant’s conception of purposiveness entails that a purposive object satisfy its causally efficacious concept’s normative constraint. How, then, can I claim that Kant’s conception is non-normative?

There is an important difference between the way in which normativity enters Ginsborg’s account, and the way in which it enters mine. On my reading, a judgment of purposiveness, in Kant’s technical sense, is concerned with an exceedingly fundamental ontological distinction. By pointing to its concept’s role in an object’s coming into being, a judgment of purposiveness makes the determination that the thing in question is a product of rational and not of mechanistic causality—of conceptually guided processes, not of nature churning aimless. A judgment of this sort proclaims the ontological status of the object to be that of an effect of mind and meaning—it thus proclaims the object’s artifacthood. This ontological judgment does entail a normative fact about the object in question: an effect of the causality of concepts is as it is (by the standard of its conceptual cause) supposed to be. But the normativity here rides on the metaphysics—satisfaction of the concept’s normative constraint is cheap. Ex hypothesi, if the object did not satisfy the constraint (however minimally), it would not be a conceptual-content-become-real and, hence, an effect of the causality of a concept. Normativity thus enters the picture, as it were, by default.

But then, whatever my determination of an object’s artifacthood may be based upon, it does not presuppose any substantive appeal to the normative constraint placed

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75 As we know from the argument from design, circumstantial factors such as regularity, complexity and adaptation (let alone characteristics such as tool-marks and inscriptions) suffice to make the judgment. As David Hume reminds us at length, however, one must take great care here, lest the judgment turn out
on the object by its purported conceptual cause. It only presupposes that there be such a cause and, hence, such a constraint. Accordingly, it does not rest on an actual evaluation of whether the object is the way it is (by the standard of its conceptual cause) supposed to be (hence, of the degree to which the concept’s constraint is satisfied).

Rather, to judge that an object is purposive, in Kant’s transcendental sense, is to make the claim that the object has its origin in a concept (whatever concept that may be); hence, that it is the way its concept’s content says it ought to be (whatever way that may be and however successful). Without thus requiring an evaluative appeal to the object’s satisfaction of its causally efficacious concept’s normative constraint, a judgment of purposiveness is strictly backward-looking, non-teleological, and non-normative.

The nature of Kant’s non-teleological definition of purposiveness, then, is this. Kant acknowledges that it is in virtue of a causally efficacious concept’s representational link to its effect that the causality of concepts must be treated as a special form of causality, distinct from mechanism. Having granted this much, however, Kant abstains from transforming this etiological point into a teleological one. Because it does not make substantive, evaluative appeal to the content of an object’s purported conceptual cause, a judgment of purposiveness, in Kant’s sense, remains at the level of a strictly ontological, non-normative attribution of artifacthood. Kant’s transcendental definition of purposiveness thus successfully prevents teleology, which it was ostensibly designed to shut out by shutting out intention and design, from sneaking back in.

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76 We can see this in Kant’s discussion of ancient stone utensils of unknown purpose (see KU, AA 05: 236.11n), and of an apparently authorless hexagon drawn in the sand (see KU, AA 05: 370.16-32).