

Vocation and Destination in Kant's Practical Philosophy

Vocación y destino en la filosofía práctica de Kant

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Abstract

Kant frequently employs the German term *Bestimmung* in his mature work, and depending on context, this term can signify the Latin *determinatio*, *vocatio*, or *destinatio*. These three senses of *Bestimmung* are interconnected within Kant's system of moral teleology. *Bestimmung* as determination expresses our wills as formed and regulated by the moral law, via the categorical imperative. *Bestimmung* as vocation guides us toward a determination of willing by rational principles based on the moral law, and this "call" is inseparable from our capacity to will and act autonomously under phenomenal and historical conditions. *Bestimmung* as "destination" conveys the ends toward which moral cultivation is directed, both individually and collectively. Understanding the three integrated uses of *Bestimmung* provides a clearer picture of the scope of Kantian ethics encapsulating the long-term goals toward which we are directed individually, as members of communities, and as human beings.

Keywords

Kantian Ethics, Moral Calling, Teleology, The Highest Good.

I. The significance of *Bestimmung*.

Kant employs the term *Bestimmung* throughout his mature work, and it plays a particularly important role in his practical philosophy. Unlike Latin, which differentiates among *determinatio*, *vocatio*, and *destinatio*, which English follows, *Bestimmung* can signify determination, vocation, and destination, among other less prominent variants, so that the appropriate meaning is discernable only by context.¹ My goal is to show how these

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¹ This point is well-stated by Brandt (2007, 60): "*Das isolierte Wort 'Bestimmung' ist also unterbestimmt, es bedarf immer eines Kontextes, in dem die genaue Wortbedeutung festgelegt wird.*"

three main senses of *Bestimmung* are both differentiated and inter-connected in Kant's practical philosophy. The relationship among the three critical uses of *Bestimmung* helps clarify the encompassing ethical model within which the main elements of Kant's ethical theory are located.

Kant's exposition of the ethical life is grounded in the logic of the categorical imperative and its potential determination of human willing. Here, *Bestimmung* as determination does not signify causal-mechanistic determinism, but rather conveys a more nuanced sense of establishing, characterizing, and regulating in relation to autonomous human wills.² Following directly from this possible determination is the question of how finite subjective wills are called to expand their operative maxims in relation to the moral law. *Bestimmung* as vocation clarifies the interplay between moral logic and phenomenally-based freedom of choice. This "call" concerns our capacity as finite rational beings to recognize and respond to determination of our willing by the moral law. If we respond to this vocation by instituting moral principles in our lives and in our shared social and political worlds, we can progress toward our moral end or destination as human beings.³ The moral path therefore culminates in representations of a moral world such as the kingdom of ends as the destination toward which moral willing should be directed. The integrative structure of the Kantian moral path can remain obscured, however, if the three meanings of *Bestimmung* are not understood in their systematic connection. While the concept of determination is generally recognized as significant to Kant's moral philosophy, morality as vocation and destination, and the way the three aspects of *Bestimmung* interrelate, have received less attention.⁴ I will show how *Bestimmung* as "vocation" explicates a calling to engage in ongoing practices of moral self-cultivation, while *Bestimmung* as "destination" clarifies the related issue of the ends toward which moral cultivation is directed. The threefold sense of *Bestimmung* articulates moral endeavor as intrinsic to being human, individually and collectively. Rather than being confined to isolated dilemmas individuals might or might not face in their lives, ethics also concerns the long-term goals toward which we are directed as members of communities and as human beings. In this way, Kant's strategic use of *Bestimmung* in these inter-connected ways makes a unique contribution to discussions among 18th and 19th century thinkers concerning the broader ends of historical, political, and moral development.⁵

² See Munzel (2012, 75-76) for a valuable explication of the range of meanings.

³ The *Anthropology* addresses this collective endeavor in focusing on the human species: "with all other animals left to themselves, each individual reaches its complete destiny [*seine ganze Bestimmung*]; however, with the human being only the species, at best, reaches it; so that the human race can work its way up to its destiny [*zu seiner Bestimmung*] only through progress in a series of innumerable many generations" (AN, 7:324). The Cambridge translation often uses "destiny" where vocation or destination would be more accurate; see AN, 7:324, 7:326, 7:327, 7:329, and 7:331. Also see note 14 below.

⁴ This is not to say that sporadic references do not appear throughout the literature. Di Giovanni (2005), for example, provides a historical overview of the interplay of freedom and religion in Kant, Jacobi, Reinhold, Fichte and others, using the rubric of "The Vocation of Humankind" to structure his discussion. Wood (1999) provides valuable analyses, especially in chapter 9.

⁵ For historical overviews, see Brandt (2007, 57-102); Zöller (2013, 24-28). My goal is not to compare Kant's views to other models of *Bestimmung* appearing in the work of Spalding, Mendelssohn, or Fichte, for

II. *The moral law should be the supreme determining ground of our wills.*

Vocation as an ethical concept follows directly from the possibility of practical reason determining the wills of rational beings through the categorical imperative. In the 1st *Critique*, Kant argues that if a concept coherently expresses the maximum quality conceivable under a specific heading (e.g., perfection, freedom, or virtue), it is defined as “an **idea** [*Idee*] or a concept of reason” (A320/B377). He calls these “**transcendental ideas**,” and emphasizes they “are not arbitrarily invented [*nicht willkürlich erdichtet*], but given as problems by the nature of reason itself” (A327/B383).⁶ Unlike culturally and historically conditioned concepts, ideas of reason entail logical procedures such as consistency and non-contradiction. Kant maintains that “no object can be determined [*bestimmt*] through them,” i.e., they give no knowledge of reality. However, we should “by no means regard them as superfluous” because “the ideas make possible a transition from concepts of nature to the practical” (A329/B385-86). At the end of the *Critique*, he summarizes: “I assume that there really are pure moral laws, which determine [*bestimmen*] completely *a priori* (without regard to empirical motives, i.e., happiness) the action and omission, i.e., the use of freedom of a rational being in general, and that these laws command **absolutely**” (A807/B835). In these representative passages on the practical significance of ideas, *Bestimmung* expresses the determining power of the moral law as the supreme principle informing our autonomous willing.

The moral law and autonomy are described in the *Groundwork* as “reciprocal concepts” [*Wechselbegriffe*] (G, 4:450). Kant prioritizes autonomy in noting that “when we think of ourselves as free we transfer ourselves into a world of understanding as members of it and cognize autonomy of the will along with its consequence, morality” (G, 4:453). Further, because the moral law is generated by reason, Kant calls the relationship of the will to the moral law “self-determination [*Selbstbestimmung*]” (G, 4:427). The 2nd *Critique* expresses the relation more precisely in a well-known formulation: “whereas freedom is indeed the *ratio essendi* [the reason for being] of the moral law, the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* [the reason for cognizing] of freedom” (CPr, 5:4n). There is no moral law without freedom, and we cannot know our freedom except through the moral law (CPr, 5:29). Autonomy enables us to will and act according to rational principles, thereby introducing the intelligible into the phenomenal, the ideal into the real. Kant explains, “this [moral] law is to furnish the sensible world, as a sensible nature ... with the form of a world of understanding, that is, of a supersensible nature, though without infringing upon the mechanism of the former” (CPr, 5:43). This position concerning moral action in the world remains consistent with the 1st *Critique*'s stipulation that supersensible ideas cannot violate laws of nature (A548/B576). To further explicate how the determination of the will by the moral law is inseparable from autonomy, Kant introduces “categories of freedom” which are “directed to the determination of a free choice [*freien Willkür*]” (CPr, 5:65).

example, but rather to establish Kant's specific responses to questions of human calling and destination as intrinsic to his ethics and practical philosophy.

⁶ See Ferrarin (2015, 15, 42-45, 55) for discussion of ideas projecting a “maximum.”

Categories of freedom include harmony with maxims, with principles, or with laws; rules of commission, omission, reciprocity, and “rules of exceptions,” etc., and are formulated as distinct from the categories of the understanding determining laws of nature (CPr, 5:66). In this way, Kant delineates how “freedom is regarded as a kind of causality ...with respect to actions possible through it as appearances in the sensible world” (CPr, 5:67). The categories of freedom must be freely grasped and applied by autonomous agents; only in this way do they give rational structure or determination to a will that exercises freedom in the world.

The possible determination of human willing by the moral law is also explained as a fact or deed of reason: “pure reason can be practical—that is, can of itself, independently of anything empirical, determine the will [*den Willen bestimmen könne*] ...by a fact [*ein Factum*] in which pure reason proves itself actually practical, namely autonomy in the principle of morality by which reason determines the will to deeds [*den Willen zur That bestimmt*]” (CPr, 5:42). A few lines later, Kant reiterates, “this fact is inseparably connected with, and indeed identical with, consciousness of freedom of the will” (CPr, 5:42). The fact or act requires consciousness of our autonomy, i.e., willing according to universalizable principles in the face of opposing internal and external forces. The efficacy of ideas depends on our constitution as simultaneously sensible and intelligible beings. We are conscious of ourselves as “subject to laws of causality,” yet at the same time “as determinable [*bestimmbaren*] in an intelligible order of things” (CPr, 5:42). Practical cognition does not provide knowledge of given objects, but manifests as “a fact that points to a pure world of the understanding and, indeed, even determines [*bestimmt*] it positively and lets us cognize something of it, namely a law” (CPr, 5:43). This rational fact is non-empirical; it is given directly to consciousness as the moral law and categorical imperative that guides willing and action.⁷

The factum shows how human subjectivity is internally differentiated. We have a capacity for reason and autonomy, generating a categorical imperative in contrast with the hypothetical imperatives of empirical and other heteronomous influences. This inner differentiation is vital to understanding the “call” of moral vocation. The distinction between the objectively rational and the subjectively contingent aspects of persons is explicated as follows: “this rule is an *imperative*, that is, a rule [*ein Imperativ, d.i. eine Regel*], indicated by an ‘ought’, which expresses objective necessitation to the action ... Imperatives, therefore, hold objectively and are quite distinct from maxims, which are subjective principles” (CPr, 5:20). The rule generated by reason becomes an imperative and a duty in relation to our subjective wills guided by non-universalizable maxims. Kant further explains how “a free will must find a determining ground [*einen Bestimmungsgrund*] in the law but independently of the *matter* of the law” (CPr, 5:29).⁸

⁷ See Kleingeld (2010, 59): “although the law is given to consciousness, it is not given empirically: consciousness of the law is a fact of pure reason, and it is the only such fact.” “Moral Consciousness and the ‘fact of reason’.” For more on the factum see: CPr, 5:4, 5:6, 5:29, 5:31, 5:32, 5:47, and 5:105.

⁸ This determinative relation between form and matter in all three *Critiques* is analyzed in detail by Pollok in terms of “Kant’s transcendental hylomorphism” (2017, 118, 121ff., 143ff).

Fixed moral codes can be too narrowly defined or context-dependent to sustain the universality necessary for application under all circumstances. Therefore, “the lawgiving form” is “the only thing that can constitute the determining ground of the will [*einen Bestimmungsgrund des Willens ausmachen kann*]” (CPr, 5:29). However, the formal principle of universalizability also unfolds into the more concrete formulae of respecting all persons as ends in themselves and a kingdom of ends representing mutual autonomy under universal laws.⁹ In none of these cases, however, is the moral law a fixed set of codes or “algorithms”¹⁰; its application always requires autonomous judgment in context (G, 4:389). The law provides the formal conceptual basis for reflecting on our subjective maxims and dispositions, for modifying these in accordance with the rational ideal, and for applying moral principles under variable conditions.¹¹ Human choice is poised between material and rational determinations: we are buffeted by the compulsions of self-love and other heteronomous impulses, but we can strive to align ourselves with (or become attuned to) moral laws regulating the competing ends of rational worldly beings co-existing within finite public and natural spaces.

The sequence of cause and effect pertaining to theoretical reason, in which “objects must be the causes of the representations that determine the will,” is reversed for practical reason. In the latter case, “causality has its determining ground [*ihren Bestimmungsgrund*] solely in the pure faculty of reason” (CPr, 5:44). Kant calls this a *causa noumenon* (CPr, 5:49-50, 5:55), because the intelligible can reorder the phenomenal via human agency. Subsequently, Kant reiterates that practical reason, “does not have to do with objects for the sake of *cognizing* them but with its own ability *to make them real* (conformably with cognition of them), that is, with a *will* that is a causality inasmuch as reason contains its determining ground [*den Bestimmungsgrund*]” (CPr, 5:89). Practical principles address the human will, and it is we, through actions guided by the moral law, who can work toward actualizing the highest good in the world as a realm of ends. Kant argues that in “unconditioned causality and the capacity for it, freedom... the reality of the intelligible world is given to us, and indeed as *determined* [*bestimmt*] from a practical perspective, and this determination [*diese Bestimmung*], which for theoretical purposes would be *transcendent* (extravagant), is for practical purposes *immanent*” (CPr, 5:105; emphasis original). Once again, while eschewing metaphysical speculation, Kant articulates the significance of practical reason as guiding the ethical choices of rational beings who are “active in the sensible world in accordance with this determination [*nach dieser*

⁹ The *Groundwork* refers to the formula of the kingdom of ends as providing “a complete determination [*eine vollstandige Bestimmung*] of all maxims” (G, 4:436).

¹⁰ O’Neill (1992, 304).

¹¹ The moral law as “commanding” reoccupies some of the territory ceded by dogmatic metaphysics in relation to the critical epistemology, providing definite content to the notion of the unconditioned (*unbedingtes*), which remains empty for speculative metaphysics (G, 4:393, 4:463; CPr, 5:29, 5:31-2, 5:34; R, 6:3; PP, 8:370, etc.). The elevated status of the moral law is evident in the 2nd *Critique*’s reference to “the majesty of this holy law [*das heilige Gesetz*]” (CPr, 5:77-78). By extension, human beings *aspire to* holiness, i.e., dispositions in conformity with the law (CPr, 5:122, cf. 5:83). The concept of “vocation” mediates between the objectivity and holiness of the moral law, known through reason, and the contingent features and maxims of our subjective natures, which are inevitably at some greater or lesser distance from the ideal.

Bestimmung]” (CPr, 5:105). The dynamic, and often conflictual, relation between the moral law and finite beings who are both rationally and empirically determined sets the stage for addressing *Bestimmung* as vocation. The main issue concerns mediating the intelligible and the phenomenal through the reception of moral principles by human beings and their end-oriented actions in accordance with this “calling.”

III. *Bestimmung as moral vocation.*

Kant most often defines the moral law as giving rational determination (*Bestimmung*) to human willing. At the same time, as a modification of *Stimme* (voice), *Bestimmung* readily conveys the sense of calling or vocation, and in many instances this is the most suitable meaning. In these instances, Kant is primarily concerned with the overarching “calling” of humans as rational beings, capable of setting their own ends, to understand and apply the moral law in their lives, rather than with special vocations.¹² It is also the case that Kant sometimes uses *Bestimmung* to express the correct use of a faculty, such as reason or imagination, and in these instances it is often translated as vocation. For example, he discusses “the presumptuousness of those who so far mistake the true vocation [*der ihre wahre Bestimmung*] of reason that they make most of insight and knowledge just where insight and knowledge really cease” (A470/B498). In other words, we misuse reason in forsaking sensible experience and venturing into dogmatic speculation concerning supersensible reality. In a similar vein, Kant dismisses assertions of a “concealed unity” in nature, emphasizing: “then reason would proceed directly contrary to its vocation [*wider ihre Bestimmung verfahren*], since it would set as its goal an idea that entirely contradicts the arrangement of nature” (A651/B679). The true vocation of reason expresses its correct use according to the standards of the critical philosophy: reason formulates maximized speculative and practical concepts, but these do not in themselves produce knowledge without input from sensible experience. In these contexts, rendering *Bestimmung* as vocation is preferable to “destination,” insofar as the latter conveys an itinerary with a definite resting point, rather than an ability to pursue rational ends. Vocation is also vastly preferable to “destiny,” which has mechanistic, fatalistic, and even superstitious connotations that Kant rejects.¹³ Hence, Kant’s frequent recourse to *Bestimmung* as either vocation or destination hinging on autonomous realization under variable conditions must be distinguished from “destiny” as conveying a pre-conceived order or itinerary.¹⁴

¹² Brandt (2003, 97) accordingly emphasizes Kant’s focus on “the vocation of humanity as a whole.” Ferrarin (2015, 87 and 87 n81) makes a similar point, where he uses destination and vocation interchangeably.

¹³ In the Preface to the B edition of the 1st *Critique*, for example, Kant argues that “through criticism alone can we sever the very root of materialism, fatalism, atheism ... unbelief, of enthusiasm [*der Schwärmerei*] and superstition, which can become generally injurious, and finally also of idealism and skepticism” (Bxxxiv).

¹⁴ Destiny can have fatalistic connotations entirely opposed to Kant’s thinking, and along with “fate” better translates *Schicksal*. When Kant infrequently discusses *Schicksal*, the connotation is usually pejorative; for example, at A84-5/B117 he describes “fortune and fate [*Glück, Schicksal*]” as “concepts that have been usurped,” i.e., taken over without valid claim. He also refers to “the strings of nature and fate [*dem Faden der Natur und des Schickals*]” at A463/B491, contrasted with free actions, to summarize the antinomies. The *Religion* criticizes all rote or cultish practices in arguing: “The one aim which they all have in common is to

Most often, Kant's use of *Bestimmung* as vocation has an explicitly moral sense.¹⁵ Within this context, there may be a secondary focus on individuals cultivating their aptitudes. For example, in discussing the formulation of the categorical imperative as universality, Kant considers the case of a person finding within themselves "a talent [*ein Talent*] that by means of some cultivation could make him a useful human being in all sorts of respects" (G, 4:422-23). It would be grossly contradictory, Kant argues, for such a person to neglect this cultivation: "For as a rational being he necessarily wills that all the capacities in him be developed [*daß alle Vermögen in ihm entwickelt werden*]" (G, 4:423). The implication is that fulfilling specific vocational callings arising from our distinctive abilities is morally necessary.¹⁶ Allen Wood clarifies the moral dimension of self-cultivation in observing, "human talents should be developed so that they may be used to achieve the ends rational beings may set."¹⁷ The theme of cultivation reappears in Kant's exposition of the moral law stipulating that human beings are not mere means to external ends such as fame or profit, but ends in themselves. Kant discusses "duty to oneself," and argues that mere avoidance of conflict with the moral law is ethically deficient, because "there are in humanity predispositions [*Anlagen*] to greater perfection, which belong to the end of nature with respect to humanity in our subject." Neglecting these predispositions might "perhaps be consistent with the *preservation* of humanity, as an end in itself, but not with the *advancement* [*der Beförderung*] of this end" (G, 4:430). These remarks begin to express a regulative moral teleology; determination by reason requires both that we comprehend the moral law and apply its principles to guide the overall trajectories of our lives. In the 3rd *Critique*, this teleological theme, still understood regulatively, is extrapolated from specific individual talents to humanity's overarching moral vocation.¹⁸ Even in the *Groundwork*, Kant subsumes individual vocations within the framework of a

steer to their advantage the invisible power that presides over human destiny [*über das Schicksal der Menschen*]" (6:176). Also see note 3 above.

¹⁵ The *Groundwork* discusses reason's unsuitability for promoting happiness and stresses, "the idea of another and far worthier purpose of one's existence, to which therefore, and not to happiness, reason is properly destined [*bestimmt*] ... as supreme condition." Therefore, "the true vocation of reason [*die wahre Bestimmung derselben*] must be to produce a will that is good ... because reason, which cognizes its highest practical vocation [*die ihre höchste praktische Bestimmung*] in the establishment of a good will ... namely from fulfilling an end which in turn only reason determines [*nur Vernunft bestimmt*]" (G, 4:396). The vocation of humanity is explicitly defined as moral in numerous places; see e.g., CPr, 5:122, CPr, 5:146, CJ, 5:301, CJ, 5:447, CJ, 5:460, CJ, 5:481-82, R, 6:152, R, 6:197, AN, 7:324, CB, 8:117n.

¹⁶ An instance of special vocation is Kant's reference to his critical project, in the dedicatory epistle to the 1st *Critique*, as "my literary vocation [*meiner literarischen Bestimmung*]" (Avi/Bvi). In the 2nd *Critique*, Kant discusses exemplary individuals in their chosen professions, e.g., scholarship. He remarks that "the true scholar" is "engaged in a business and a calling [*in einem Geschäfte und Berufe*] that make imitation [*die Nachahmung*] of such a man [Kant mentions Voltaire as an example] to some extent a law for him" (CPr, 5:78).

¹⁷ Wood (1999, 91).

¹⁸ Kant limits the use of regulative teleological principles "to the reflecting, not to the determining power of judgment" (CJ, 5:360). As Kant explains, the reflecting power of judgment is "only a principle for reflection on objects for which we are entirely lacking a law or concept of the object." Therefore, it "can serve as a merely subjective principle for the purposive use of the cognitive faculties" (CJ, 5:385). Kant later clarifies how "the reflecting power of judgment" is a "principle for judging by means of which we are not brought a step further in the explanation of natural things and their origin" (CJ, 5:437).

universal moral calling without diminishing personal uniqueness: the moral law provides a meta-vocation embracing a tremendous range of biographical and cultural diversity.

Bestimmung as moral determination and as vocation are frequently inter-connected. In the B edition of the 1st *Critique*, in discussing rational psychology as the branch of metaphysics concerning the soul, Kant positions himself in relation to two antithetical stances. In keeping with the critical position (summarized at Bxxxiv), he decries both “soulless materialism” as well as the tendency to “get lost wandering about in a spiritualism that must be groundless for us in this life” (B421). He delineates a third path avoiding these extremes. Autonomous ethical cultivation directs us “away from fruitless and extravagant speculation toward fruitful practical uses [*zum fruchtbaren praktischen Gebrauche anzuwenden*], which, even if it is directed only to objects of experience, takes its principles from somewhere higher, and so determines [*so bestimmt*] our behavior, as if our vocation [*unsere Bestimmung*] extended infinitely far above experience, and hence above this life” (B421). This crucial statement concerning the primacy of practical reason summarizes how rational ideas, as universal and therefore “higher” than empirically conditioned concepts, become operative within the world through human agency. Kant makes no speculative claims; unconditioned rational principles regulatively guide human willing and acting only through autonomous agency. The use of the “as if” formulation is a key indicator of this regulative approach (see CJ, 5:404 for another important example).

The ensuing paragraphs demonstrate that these far-reaching arguments about practical vocation do not contradict the tenets of the critical philosophy. Kant reminds us that any assertion of a “cognition going beyond the bounds of possible experience yet belonging to the highest interests of humanity [*zum höchsten Interesse der Menschheit*] disappears, as far as speculative philosophy is concerned, in disappointed expectations” (B423). This statement encapsulates the two sides of Kant’s relationship to metaphysics. He conclusively rejects the speculative path to supersensible cognitions, and insists on “the same law of renunciation for all claims to dogmatic assertions” (B424). At the same time, ideas of a higher calling conceptualize human interests and goals as extending beyond e.g., hedonism, instrumental production and material accumulation. Metaphysical ideas take on their chief significance—one might say their true vocation—through practical application. Supersensible ideas “gain in clarity and unaffected conviction [*Klarheit und ungekünstelter Überzeugung*] through the removal of those dogmatic pretensions.” When we relinquish claims to supersensible knowledge, we are able to “place reason in its proper territory, namely the order of ends [*die Ordnung der Zwecke*] that is at the same time an order of nature” (B425). Here again the B edition anticipates the 3rd *Critique*. Practical regulative ideas conceptualize nature as ordered and purposeful, but only from the standpoint of human ethical activity. Concepts such as vocation and final end provide practical direction for our lives, without violating the bounds of reason or the laws nature. In this way, Kant discusses the *Bestimmung* of everything in life (“*aller seiner Bestimmung im Leben,*” where *Bestimmung* is translated as “function” by Wood and Guyer and as “destination” by Pluhar). The vocational quality of humanity’s *Bestimmung* is unmistakable in Kant’s

reference to “the human being, who alone can contain within himself the ultimate final end [*letzten Endzweck*] of all this” (B425). The calling to serve as a final end derives from “natural predispositions, not only his talents and the drives to make use of them, but chiefly the moral law in him” (B425). The latter, in particular, stimulates us to go beyond “utility and advantage” and “to esteem above all else mere consciousness of a disposition to rectitude [or, a righteousness of disposition, *der Rechtschaffenheit der Gesinnung*]” (B425). This “consciousness” does not involve a self-satisfied and passive stance; rather, Kant expresses this as being “called inwardly, through his conduct in the world... to make himself a suitable citizen of a better one, which he has in its idea” (B426). In other words, ideas of reason, in particular practical reason, call us to become worthy of a realm of ends, and this worthiness manifests itself through conduct in the actual world. In these passages, the moral law as the ultimate determination (*Bestimmung*) guiding our autonomous wills, is correlated with a complimentary sense of *Bestimmung* as a calling to fulfill our potential as rational worldly beings who transform phenomenal reality through action.

The theme of moral calling is prominent in later writings, as Kant addresses issues of ethical cultivation and application. I will discuss only selected examples. The 2nd *Critique* argues that the pursuit of happiness as a supreme principle “would ruin morality altogether were not the voice of reason [*die Stimme der Vernunft*] in reference to the will so distinct, so irrepressible, and so audible even to the most common human beings” (CPr, 5:35). The voice of practical reason has unmistakable connotations of a moral calling; here it counterbalances the powerful lure of immediate pleasure. Building on this formulation, Kant reproaches those who “are brazen enough to shut their ears to that heavenly voice [*jene himmlische Stimme*]” (CPr, 5:35), reformulating, as he often does, metaphysical and theological concepts for ethical purposes. Subsequently, Kant proclaims: “There is something so singular in the boundless esteem for the pure moral law stripped of all advantage—as practical reason, whose voice makes even the boldest evildoer [or sinner] tremble [*deren Stimme auch den kühnsten Frevler zittern macht*] and forces him to hide from its sight, presents it to us for obedience” (CPr, 5:79-80). Kant is not reticent in attributing sovereign authority to the moral law, which also forms a crucial feature of his political philosophy and his vision of an ethical community.¹⁹ There are clear associations as well with the “voice of conscience,” calling to those who willfully stray into radical evil (R, 6:70n, 6:77, etc., and cf. CJ, 5:446). At the same time, even the “heavenly voice” of practical reason requires those who can hear, understand, and respond to its imperatives, viz., autonomous rational agents applying moral principles under phenomenal conditions.²⁰

More explicitly, Kant discusses “the genuine moral incentive of pure practical reason,” which “is nothing other than the pure moral law itself insofar as it lets us discover the sublimity of our own supersensible existence and subjectively effects respect for their

¹⁹ For more on the moral law as sovereign in an ethical community, see DiCenso (2011, 196ff.) and DiCenso (2019).

²⁰ The 3rd *Critique* portrays the ethical development of early humans occurring “as if they heard an inner voice.” This is connected with an “inner vocation of the mind [*innere Zweckbestimmung ihres Gemüths*],” as well as with “their inner moral law [*ihrem inneren Sittengesetze*]” (CJ, 5:458).

higher vocation [*ihre höhere Bestimmung*] in human beings” (CPr, 5:88; and cf. 5:107-8). Connecting ethical vocation with the sublime also anticipates the 3rd *Critique*, although the later text explicates this interconnection more extensively, as I will discuss in section IV. However, our free response to the moral call is essential in both writings. Kant’s model of vocation is grounded in rational ideas, yet addresses the limitations on achievement deriving from our status as finite worldly beings. He emphasizes, “The proposition [*Der Satz*] about the moral vocation of our nature [*der moralischen Bestimmung unserer Natur*], that only in an endless progress can we attain complete conformity with the moral law, is of the greatest usefulness” (CPr, 5:122). The idea of endless progress, rather than representing a failure of moral achievement, helps us avoid two extreme attitudes. One is the tendency that “degrades the moral law from its holiness by making it out to be lenient (indulgent) and thus conformed to our own convenience,” i.e., not requiring ongoing moral effort (CPr, 5:122). The opposite, excessively idealistic, extreme is equally deleterious. Kant describes this as, “expectation to an unattainable vocation [*einer unerreichbaren Bestimmung*], namely to a hoped-for full acquisition of holiness of will, and so gets lost in enthusiastic [or fanatical, *schwärmende*] *theosophical* dreams that quite contradict self-knowledge” (CPr, 5:123). Neither of these seemingly antithetical approaches to morality supports persistent effort. By contrast, the concept of endless approximation helps us focus on actively cultivating the moral ideal, while acknowledging the inevitable obstacles arising from both internal (volitional) and empirical sources.

For this reason, Kant repeatedly emphasizes the *striving* toward goodness, which concerns the overall orientation of our wills, dispositions and actions over the course of life. Section IX of the Dialectic of the 2nd *Critique*, entitled “On the wise adaptation of the human being’s cognitive faculties to his practical vocation [*der praktischen Bestimmung des Menschen*],” discusses how “human nature is called [*bestimmt*] to strive for the highest good.” Because this call (or determination) comes from reason, it must be assumed that our cognitive faculties are “suitable to this end” (CPr, 5:146). This argument is characteristic of the “ought implies can” principle: because the moral ideal is generated by our rational faculties, we must have the capacity to advance toward it. In concluding, Kant explicates this call to moral development in the well-known discussion of the awe inspired by “the moral law within me” (CPr, 5:161). Kant refers to “the purposive determination of my existence [*der zweckmäßigen Bestimmung meines Daseins*] by this law” (CPr, 5:162), again showing that ethics extends beyond the application of the categorical imperative to special dilemmas.

IV. *Vocation and sublimity in the 3rd Critique.*

The 3rd *Critique* offers a subtle rendering of the experience of sublimity that elucidates its relation to moral vocation. While experiences of the sublime are triggered by the awe and majesty of nature in storms, mountain peaks, etc., the key issue is awareness of our own supersensible faculties: “what is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though no presentation [*keine ...Darstellung*] adequate to them is possible, are provoked and called to mind [*ins Gemüth*”

gerufen werden] precisely by this inadequacy, which does allow of sensible presentation” (CJ, 5:245). Hence, the *inadequacy* of the sensible presentation of rational ideas becomes manifest to us through the efforts of the imagination, and this failure awakens or calls (*rufen*) us to the sublimity of reason. We experience ideas of reason as unconditioned and uncontainable within any sensory representation. This point anticipates Kant's emphasis on the power of the moral law exceeding that of mere nature over the ensuing pages. In the experience of the “mathematical sublime,” the magnitude of practical ideas exceeds containment within any sensory representation, and this tension between idea and inadequate efforts at presentation evokes sublimity in relation to immeasurability. However, the dynamical sublime is associated more directly with the theme of vocation. Kant discusses subreption, which concerns projecting an internal faculty or capacity onto nature. Subreption further shows “the limits and inadequacy” of the imagination in presenting as sensible that which is really intellectual, but it also shows “its [the imagination's] vocation [*ihre Bestimmung*] for adequately realizing that idea as a law” (CJ, 5:257). In other words, the imagination has a function in expressing laws of reason, even if these efforts at sensible rendering occur indirectly through projection onto nature and remain inadequate.

The failure of imagination reveals the more encompassing human vocation associated with our rational faculties and their priority over sensible determinations: “Thus the feeling of the sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation [*für unsere eigene Bestimmung*], which we show to an object in nature through a certain subreption (substitution of a respect for the object instead of the idea of humanity in our subject), which as it were makes intuitable the superiority of the rational vocation of our cognitive faculty [*der Vernunftbestimmung unserer Erkenntnißvermögen*] over the greatest faculty of sensibility” (CJ, 5:257).²¹ The experience of sublimity involves a dynamic interplay between the limits of sensibility, given through the imagination, and ideas of reason, “insofar as striving [*die Bestrebung*] for them [i.e., for ideas] is nevertheless a law for us” (CJ, 5:257).²² Once again, the theme of striving as an ongoing process of achieving the ideal is central to moral vocation. After reiterating how “it is a law of reason” that even the greatest aspects of nature seem small in comparison with rational ideas, Kant notes, “whatever arouses the feeling of this supersensible vocation in us [*dieser übersinnlichen Bestimmung in uns*] is in agreement with that law” (CJ, 5:257-58). Experience of the sublime clarifies the process of recognizing our vocation as rational worldly beings, i.e., beings for whom ideas and ideals will necessarily be at some degree of remove from empirical reality, wherein that very distance serves to awaken us to the powers of reason. The experience of sublimity exemplifies a reflective process by which we gain awareness of how ideas cannot be matched by “any sensible standard,” tipping the balance of our

²¹ This is why the experience of nature provides “an occasion [or opportunity, *Gelegenheit*] for us to perceive the inner purposiveness in the relationship of our mental powers” (CJ, 5:350).

²² Kant uses the same term to discuss “*die größte Bestrebung der Einbildungskraft*,” rendered as “greatest effort of the imagination” two sentences later (CJ, 5:258).

allegiance toward reason. The failure of the imagination to represent ideas induces “a displeasure that arouses the feeling of the supersensible vocation in us [*unserer übersinnlichen Bestimmung in uns*], in accordance with that which is purposive” (CJ, 5:258). We feel the power of nature dwarfing our physical beings, and yet we thereby “discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent all-powerfulness of nature” (CJ, 5:261). This “other kind” of inner power is found in the non-sensible standard given by “our own faculty of reason” (CJ, 5:261) which cannot be overwhelmed or negated by mere physical power. Noteworthy here is Kant’s reference to courage, a term central to his reflections on enlightenment (E, 8:35, R, 6:57), and which conveys a capacity to engage challenges where the outcome is not guaranteed, or even favorable. At issue here is moral courage, which surpasses the force of nature and is inseparable from freedom of choice and responsibility. In facilitating this inner awareness, the sublime “calls forth our power [*unsere Kraft ... in uns aufruft*]” (CJ, 5:262). In this way, an inherent capacity for autonomy and ethical endeavor is elicited in the form of the calling and sense of vocation that are so prominent throughout these passages.

Reason and imagination cooperate in presenting ideas indirectly (CJ, 5:266). Even though, “taken literally, and considered logically, ideas cannot be presented (*darstellt*),” the “effort [or striving, *Bestrebung*] [of the mind], and the feeling of the unattainability of the idea by the imagination, is itself a presentation of the subjective purposiveness of our mind in the use of the imagination for its supersensible vocation [*für dessen übersinnliche Bestimmung*]” (CJ, 5:268). The tension between idea and image yields insight into our supersensible faculties, notably our capacity to act in accordance with principles rather than in response to conditioned forces (e.g., physical coercion or societal influences). We experience ourselves as able to *think* of supersensible concepts, even “without being able to produce this presentation **objectively**” (CJ, 5:268). The sublime asserts “our independence in the face of nature” and, reciprocally, serves “to place what is absolutely great only in the subject’s own vocation [*nur in seiner (des Subjects) eigenen Bestimmung zu setzen*]” (CJ, 5:269).²³ The ethical significance of this awakening to supersensible ideas and the vocational demands they place on us is explicated in the ensuing passages. “Thus the sublime must always have a relation to the manner of thinking [*auf die Denkungsart*], i.e., to maxims for making the intellectual and the ideas of reason superior to sensibility” (CJ, 5:274; and cf. CJ, 5:280). The focus on maxims indicates a concern with the principles guiding willing and acting. Kant also contrasts this “soul-elevating [*seelenerhebende*], merely negative presentation of morality,” manifest through sublimity, with “visionary rapture [*Schwärmerei*]” that transgresses the bounds of reason and sense (CJ, 5:275). This emphasizes the practical significance of supersensible ideas as avoiding the fatalism of

²³ In a parallel discussion, Kant contrasts “the satisfaction in an action on account of its moral quality” with pleasure arising from the senses. Moral satisfaction consists “of self-activity and of its appropriateness to the idea of its vocation” (CJ, 5:292).

both materialism and *Schwärmerei* by addressing how we think and act in the world according to principles, i.e., autonomously.

Kant's analyses of moral vocation with reference to the sublime occur within the context of aesthetic judgment; this forms an essential prelude to his explication of vocation within the framework of teleological judgment. The topic is vast. Even if we confine ourselves to the latter sections of the "Critique of Teleological Judgment" (sections 83 and following), we encounter a dense network of interwoven arguments. Within this network, moral vocation intersects with explorations of ethico-theology and the moral and teleological proofs for God (sections 86-91).²⁴ These discussions establish a wider conceptual framework for understanding moral vocation in relation to the ends of reason. However, because of space limitations, I will conclude by focusing on moral vocation as ethical activity in the world.

V. Moral vocation, community, and the highest good as destination.

One of the main themes of the concluding sections of the 3rd *Critique* concerns our ethical vocation as rational worldly beings to introduce ideas of reason into existing conditions in the world.²⁵ In section 83, Kant recapitulates how, viewed on the level of "natural predispositions," a human being is "a link in the chain of natural ends ...with regard to many ends which nature seems to have determined for him in its predispositions [*in ihrer Anlage bestimmt*; i.e., in terms of the predispositions given to us by nature]" (CJ, 5:430-31). However, while acknowledging natural determination with regard to biologically-driven ends, Kant also stresses that the human being is "the sole being on earth who has reason" and who thereby can conceptualize and choose ends (CJ, 5:430-31). Nature provides us with predispositions to sociality and morality, but these predispositions must be actively cultivated (also see IU, 8:20-22, CJ, 5:430-2). We can employ reason to reflect critically on our ends, guided by universalizable rational principles such as justice, fairness, and equality. In this way, reason as practical can regulate instrumental uses of reason, by assessing activities and endeavors with regard to the more encompassing principles of the moral law.

Kant does not simply oppose naturalism and autonomy, but rather argues that we can grasp nature regulatively, "as if" it was also governed by teleological principles, thereby mediating our experience of ourselves as both supersensible (rational) and sensible. "If nature is regarded as a teleological system, then it is his [the human being's] vocation to be the ultimate end of nature [*seiner Bestimmung nach der letzte Zweck der Natur*]; but always only conditionally, that is, subject to the condition that he has the understanding and the will to give to nature and to himself a relation to an end that can be

²⁴ This use of theological language in a practical respect is contentious. Ferrarin (2015, 93, n91), for example, questions its utility. However, whether we are favorably or unfavorably disposed to Kant's use of theological concepts, it is always the case that these are conceptualized within the purview of practical reason. In the 3rd *Critique*, among many such passages, Kant emphasizes: "only reason, by means of its moral principles, is capable of having produced the concept of God" (CJ, 5:447). I discuss the practical significance of Kant's use of the concept of God in greater detail in DiCenso (2017).

²⁵ For example: "this moral teleology concerns us as beings in the world [*als Weltwesen*] and thus as beings connected with other things in the world, upon which this very same law prescribes us to direct our judging" (CJ, 5:447).

sufficient to itself independently of nature, which can thus be a final end” (CJ, 5:431). The model of purposiveness in Kant’s moral teleology makes no speculative claims about an inherent order of nature or a necessary structure and end to history. In accordance with regulative principles and with the reflective use of judgement, teleological claims concern an order of reason whose realization is inseparable from the autonomous use of our faculties in the world.²⁶ The essential point is that even if humans are “the highest ends” of nature because we can set rational ends, this status is not simply given; it is a vocation requiring active achievement under contingent circumstances. Kant therefore separates what people “*must do* in order to *become* a final end... from all those ends the possibility of which depends on conditions which can be expected only from nature” (CJ, 5:431, italics added). The element of freedom of choice applied in context is crucial, because such application requires mature moral judgment and cannot be reduced to a mechanistic procedure.

Additionally, as the argument develops, it becomes clear that the purposive activity with which Kant is concerned is not confined to the individual level alone. Kant begins by stressing that “the production of an aptitude of a rational being for any ends in general (and thus for his freedom) is **culture** [*ist die Cultur*]” (CJ, 5:431). After briefly discussing the more instrumental “culture of skill,” Kant turns to a “culture of discipline,” which “consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires” (CJ, 5:432). On an individual level, culture or cultivation involves an internal process of the free development of our capacities and talents. However, Kant also depicts “the development of the natural predispositions of the human race,” as requiring shared rational institutions. “The formal condition under which alone nature can attain its final aim [*Endabsicht*] is that constitution [*Verfassung*] in the relations of human beings with one another in which the abuse of reciprocally conflicting freedom is opposed by lawful power in a whole, which is called **civil society**; for only in this can the greatest development of the natural predispositions occur” (CJ, 5:432).²⁷ The notion of an *Endabsicht* is not a determinate teleological principle, but a regulative principle for the reflecting power of judgment (CJ, 5:416, 5:437-8, 5:445, 5:455-56).²⁸ If, as we have seen, this *Endabsicht* requires internal cultivation, then in this passage Kant clearly links our moral vocation with instituting just constitutions externally, i.e. socio-culturally and politically. Kant also makes reference, at CJ, 5:432, to the need for “a cosmopolitan whole, i.e., a system of all states that are at risk of detrimentally affecting each other...” He argues that such a “morally grounded system”

²⁶ The “concept of the purposiveness of nature ... is necessary for the human power of judgment in regard to nature but does not pertain to the determination of the objects themselves, thus a subjective principle of reason for the power of judgment which, as regulative (not constitutive), is just as necessarily valid for our **human power of judgment** as if it were an objective principle” (CJ, 5:404). Ginsborg (2015, 326ff.) offers a valuable analysis of purposiveness in relation to normativity, emphasizing throughout the regulative status of the concepts.

²⁷ The connection of “moral vocation of the human species” with social transformation and the “perfection of a civil constitution” is discussed by Wood (1999, 296).

²⁸ Pollok (2017, 104-110) provides an important discussion of purposiveness as a regulative principle for the reflective power of judgment.

forms the basis for individuals to engage in “developing to their highest degree all the talents that serve for culture” (CJ, 5:433). While the theme is not well-developed in the 3rd *Critique*, Kant is arguing that we require institutional conditions that stimulate and support our supersensible vocation as bearers of rational morality. While occasional experiences of sublimity can act as catalysts on the individual level, rightful polities, nationally and internationally, create the necessary conditions for supporting and maximizing our capacity to realize moral ends. This connection between collective institutions and vocation is more directly formulated in the *Anthropology*'s description of “a civil constitution [*einer bürgerlichen Verfassung*], which is the highest degree of artificial improvement of the human species' good predisposition to the final end of its destiny [*zur Endzweck ihrer Bestimmung ist*]” (AN, 7:327). As I have noted, “destiny” is a misleading translation of *Bestimmung*; since Kant is describing a potentiality directed toward a final end that requires autonomous agency, vocation or destination are clearly more suitable renderings. We must actively develop and maintain just constitutions and rightfully regulated civil societies that support moral ends (see CF, 7:88, 90, 91, 93 for further analysis of the duty to establish just constitutions).

While rightful socio-political conditions can provide the opportunities for the cultivation of our talents and capacities, no polity can induce moral cultivation. Morality requires freely adopted inner maxims, unlike legality or external right that is established through coercive institutions (MM, 6:214).²⁹ This distinction is elucidated in Kant's formulation of the non-coercive institutions of “an *ethico-civil*” or “*ethical community*” (R, 6:94-95), as juxtaposed with a “juridico-civil society” of external laws, which I have discussed at length elsewhere.³⁰ The key point is that collective moral pedagogy can facilitate the cultivation of our inner capacity to freely choose ethical maxims. Without such support, we are more likely to succumb to the influences of contingent and parochial cultural norms, often prioritizing our crudest inclinations, such as immediate gain, pleasure, and ascendancy over others. These inclinations “belong more to our animality and are most opposed to our education for our higher vocation [*der Ausbildung zu unserer höheren Bestimmung*] [...] and of making room for the development [*Entwicklung*] of humanity” (CJ, 5:433). When we can recognize “a sovereignty in which reason alone shall have power,” and not be impeded by “the intolerant selfishness of human beings,” then we are increasingly able “to feel an aptitude for higher ends [*eine Tauglichkeit zu höheren Zwecken*], which lies hidden in us” (CJ, 5:434). Final, goal-oriented ends cannot be based on natural predispositions alone; they do not become established without concerted efforts over a protracted period of time. This point is consolidated in Kant's argument that “the final end cannot be an end that nature would be sufficient to produce in accordance with its idea, because it is unconditioned” (CJ, 5:435). The unconditioned moral law enters into the world only through rational agency; hence there is “in the world only a single sort of beings whose causality is teleological, i.e., aimed at ends ... The being of this sort is the

²⁹ At the same time, Kant understands both ethics and law as ideally regulated by the principle of universality, and each sphere affects the other (MM, 6:239).

³⁰ See DiCenso (2019).

human being” (CJ, 5:435). The self-determination necessary to actualizing the moral law under phenomenal conditions is the defining feature of humans as ends in themselves.³¹ The human being is the only natural being who contains “a supersensible faculty (**freedom**) and even the law of the causality together with the object that it can set for itself as the highest end (the highest good in the world)” (CJ, 5:435). Actions regulated by practical reason are directed toward the highest good in the world, which concerns not just the conjunction of happiness with morality, but particularly the *worthiness* to be happy (i.e., justice). The “highest good” as an end or destination is determined by the moral law and projected as the end toward which that determination points: “The moral law, as the formal rational condition of the use of our freedom, obligates us by itself alone, without depending on any sort of end as a material condition; yet it also determines for us, and indeed does so a priori, a final end, to strive after which it makes obligatory for us, and this is *the highest good in the world possible through freedom*” (CJ, 5:450).³² Between determination and destination, however, the autonomous agents capable of progressing toward the highest good must be guided by a sense of this calling.

It is significant, therefore, that the ensuing sections of the 3rd *Critique* are concerned with the connection between our moral vocation and the moral idea of God. In order that the human being “remain attached to the appeal of his moral inner vocation [*dem Ruhe seiner sittlichen inneren Bestimmung*] and not weaken in this respect ...he must assume the existence of a **moral** author of the world, i.e., God, from a practical point of view, i.e., in order to form a concept of at least the possibility of the final end that is prescribed to him by morality” (CJ, 5:452-53). While this theme requires a separate treatment, it is clear that the moral idea of God in no way abrogates human autonomy; it provides the conceptual resources for projecting our activity toward an ethical end that exceeds immediate achievement. This approach to the idea of God is consistent with, and builds on Kant’s discussions of the postulates of practical reason in the 2nd *Critique* (CPr, 5:122ff.).³³

The moral concept of God functions regulatively to guide human activity progressing toward the highest good in the world. In section 88, Kant describes how “pure reason, as a practical faculty, i.e., as a faculty for determining the free use of our causality by means of ideas [*den freien Gebrauch unserer Causalität durch Ideen ... zu bestimmen*] (pure concepts of reason) not only contains a regulative principle for our actions in the moral law, but at the same time also thereby provides a subjectively constitutive one ... which is to be made actual by means of our actions in the world [*durch unsere Handlungen in der Welt ... wirklich gemacht werden soll*] in accordance with the concept” (CJ, 5:453).

³¹ Kant’s repeatedly emphasizes human freedom: “it is the value that he alone can give to himself, and which consists in what he does, in how and in accordance with which principles he acts, not as a link in nature but in the **freedom** of his faculty of desire; i.e., a good will is that alone by means of which his existence can have an absolute value and in relation to which the existence of the world can have a **final end**” (CJ, 5:443). Autonomous human agency in realizing the highest good in the world is also stressed by Wood, 1999, 311ff.

³² And cf.: “We are determined [*bestimmt*] a priori by reason to promote with all of our powers what is best in the world ... the combination of universal happiness with the most lawful morality” (CJ, 5:453).

³³ And see DiCenso (2011, 204ff.) for discussion of the practical postulates.

While confirming the moral law as regulating or determining our willing, Kant also explicates how the formal law works in conjunction with freedom of choice. The moral law represents an ought-to-be, a rational rule, that *becomes* constitutive, i.e., modifies existing conditions, only through human action in the world. In this way alone, rational ideas can transform the social worlds we produce and inhabit. Moral teleology is grounded in the objective law, but its realization is predicated on the exercise of human autonomy directed toward realizing the highest good in the world.³⁴ Kant differentiates the practical and regulative determination of ends in the world from theoretical cognition of laws of nature. The relationship of teleology to nature is similar to that of the sublime, where no determinate knowledge is at issue, but rather a relation to nature that catalyzes inner awareness. Kant therefore places major emphasis on “making the final end which in accordance with the precept of the moral law we ourselves have to fulfill into the guideline for reason’s judgment about our vocation [*unsere Bestimmung*] (which can be considered as necessary or worthy of being assumed only in a practical relation)” (CJ, 5:460). With regard to “moral teleology,” he similarly concludes that the use of this concept is inseparable from “our practical vocation [*unserer praktischen Bestimmung*]” (CJ, 5:461). In these and many other passages, Kant presents rational moral endeavor, and not instrumental reason and the ensuing proliferation of technology, as constituting the true vocation (*Bestimmung, vocatio*) of humanity. Moral teleology concerns autonomous subjects realizing the moral law in the world through individual actions, equitable human relations, and establishing just institutions. Vocation is impossible without autonomy, because the moral law must be rationally understood and applied, not only to our subjective maxims, but also within varying biographical, societal, and historical contexts.

I have sought to clarify the integrated nature of the three meanings of *Bestimmung*, and the importance of this integrated set of concepts for understanding the wider trajectory of Kant’s practical philosophy. *Bestimmung* as determination is correlated with the formality of the moral law providing the logical structure of morality. *Bestimmung* as vocation concerns recognition of the moral law by rational worldly beings, and articulates the need for ongoing ethical application in the world. *Bestimmung* as destination sets the encompassing rational ends—maximization of human potentiality under conditions of mutually supportive freedom—toward which moral vocation is directed. Kant’s practical philosophy retains several core traditional and rationalist ideas: universal law, teleology, vocation, and a progressive transformation of our inner dispositions and, through action in the world, of human institutions which reflect and support further cultivation of moral autonomy. These ideas are molded into Kant’s distinctive hylomorphic vision of the human condition, in which the ideal and the real interact through the autonomous agency of rational beings.³⁵ The realization of the ideal “ought” formally prescribed by the moral law requires responsiveness to our vocation on a level transcending the specific moral

³⁴ A few pages later, Kant reiterates that in “the practical sphere” a regulative principle such as acting in conformity with a rational end “is at the same time constitutive, i.e., practically determining [*d.i. praktisch bestimmend*]” (CJ, 5:457).

³⁵ See Pollok (2017), 121ff.

dilemmas we face on a day-to-day basis. However, because moral vocation entails the collective cultivation of rationality, autonomy, and the establishment of shared institutions supporting them, there is nothing certain about the hope associated with this calling.

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