

Laura Anna Macor: *DIE BESTIMMUNG DES MENSCHEN (1748-1800): EINE BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE*. FROMMAN HOLZBOOG, 2013, 432 PP.

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Laura Anna Macor's *Die Bestimmung des Menschen (1748-1800): Eine Begriffsgeschichte* is a testament of an enormous philological, historical and philosophical work, one that was no doubt necessary to deal with the amplitude and complexity of the concept it discusses. As Macor herself notes at the beginning of the book, while being maybe one of the fundamental ideas of German's late Enlightenment, the concept of the "*Bestimmung des Menschen*" (which could be translated as "the destination of man", but, due to the untranslatable plurality of meanings of the word, we shall use here without translation) has still had very little research done on it, if compared to other central ideas of that branch of Enlightenment (p. 26). As the book itself however attests to, this is not due to the irrelevance of the concept as a fundamental idea in comparison to other ideas of German's Enlightenment. Rather, on the contrary, it's precisely the gigantic reach of the concept at the time when it flourished, in the second half of the eighteenth century, that makes it a very challenging field of research. In fact, as Macor shows, the impact and influence the concept had at this period was vast and even overwhelming, one of the reasons for that being precisely that the richness of the concept, with the plurality of meanings contained in the word "Bestimmung", led to a very diversified reception and development of it. Being that the case, when one looks back at first to how this concept was ostensibly used, it might seem, precisely because of that, that it's more of a linguistic than of a philosophical phenomenon, a mere common expression which, precisely due to its vagueness, couldn't be of a larger philosophical significance.

Yet, Macor's book is an attempt of showing precisely the contrary. One of the ways it does so is precisely by pointing out how the later decline of the concept into a mere "slogan" was precisely due to its early philosophical relevance, which made its use spread not only into theology and philosophy, but also into literary and popular productions, even into religious songs. In that regard, Macor's book shows successfully, to my understanding, that the plurality

of meanings of the word “Bestimmung” and the concept in which it’s contained, as well as its very diversified use, reception and development, while making the study of the concept of “Die Bestimmung des Menschen” very difficult, are precisely what show the philosophical relevance and richness of the concept.

Of course, given this complexity and richness of the concept, in order to be able to explore its history properly, one would have to do not only a very careful and thorough philosophical, but also philological and historical work. In that way, Macor’s book is praiseworthy not only in how it frames very consequently the approach it takes on the study of the concept within Hinske’s topology, but also in its outstanding documentation and analysis, which allow for a very careful and thorough exam of many, even if of course not all, of the most relevant uses of the concept. The book thus offers a very fundamental groundwork for the study not only of the concept of “Die Bestimmung des Menschen” in specific, as a basis idea of German’s Enlightenment, but also for the study of the concept of “Bestimmung” in general and the role it played in German philosophy and German Idealism.

In the introduction of the book we are thus presented with the framework within which the history of the concept will be traced, namely that of Hinske’s typology of the “bearing [*trägenden*] fundamental ideas of German’s Enlightenment” (p. 19). Those ideas, according to Hinske and Macor, must be considered according to what the researched period itself considered to be the ideas of most philosophical interest, and not according to what we understand today to be its heritage. This approach, it is worth noting, seems indispensable when dealing with the concept of “Die Bestimmung des Menschen”, for, as noted before, if we were to approach this concept by means of the way it looks for us today, it could seem to be irrelevant, due to its spread in popular culture and in common language and the vagueness of meaning which it acquired.

In order to frame further the methodological approach of the concept, Macor continues to insert the concept within Hinske’s typology, by recurring to Hinske’s division of the ideas that compose a philosophical movement into three different moments. Those moments are namely: the ideas that compose the *program* of the philosophical movement, the *combat* against determined convictions, and the *basis*, the anthropological presuppositions that underlie a philosophical movement (p.20). The concept of “Die Bestimmung des Menschen” would be accordingly one of the ideas that constitute the basis of German Enlightenment, alongside the idea of the universal human reason, having also a close relationship with one of the ideas that constitute the program of German Enlightenment, namely that of self-improvement.

The most important point to make here however, so one can understand the trajectory taken by the book, is the following: all those “bearing fundamental ideas” have to be understood not as being static, but rather, as dynamic, and going through a development that can also be understood in three different aspects. First, that those ideas are *genuinely philosophical*, that is, express the philosophical concerns of German Enlightenment, regardless of in which disciplinary field they are explored, discussed and/or developed. Second, they are ideas *in transformation*, that is, they undergo a process of development and have their meaning expanded or transformed as they are object of debate and dispute. Third, that they

are always at risk of becoming mere slogans, losing their philosophical depth and becoming of mere propagandistic value (p. 21).

Regarding the basis idea of “Die Bestimmung des Menschen”, all those moments become abundantly clear in Macor’s exposition of the history of the concept. First, by showing that the concept has its origins in Spalding’s attempts, inspired by Shaftesbury’s moral philosophy, of reconciling deistic and Christian conceptions of religion by means of an existential anchoring of religion in mankind’s natural, moral feelings, Macor’s shows the authentically philosophical (and theological) origins of the concept. Secondly, by carefully exposing and detailing each phase of the development of the concept, which begins as a theological one, acquires a moral-philosophical dimension and becomes later on a philosophical-historical concept, Macor shows that “Die Bestimmung des Menschen” is, indeed, an idea “in transformation”. Lastly, by discussing Fichte’s “contradictory contribution” to the history of the concept, Macor convincingly argues that, by replacing the “destination” (*Bestimmung*) of man with the “profession” (*Beruf*) of man, Fichte leads to the ultimate exhaustion of the concept, and thus to its decline to a mere slogan.

In the Chapter One of the First Part of the book, in order to retrace the steps of this history of the concept, Macor does very extensive philological work, retracing the origins of the word *Bestimmung* in the German language back to Luther’s language and to the *Frühneuhochdeutsch* and *Neuhochdeutsch*. By means of this extensive study of the history of the word – which must also be distinguished from the history of the concept (p 37) – the author points out that the word *Bestimmung*, by the end of the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, had three possible meanings: first, the meaning linked to the original meaning of the verb *bestimmen*. *Bestimmen*, in this original sense, could be translated as defining, establishing, fixating, ordering (*festlegen, festsetzen, anordnen*) and thus *Bestimmung* should be understood either as the act designated by the verb or as the product of that act. Secondly, the meaning of properties or qualities of a thing, in which case it is used mostly in the plural case (“Die Bestimmungen”, that is “Die Eigenschaften” of a tree, an animal and so on). Thirdly and most importantly for the theme of this book, the meaning of “*Endzweck*”, of “ultimate goal” or “destination” – a meaning which emphasizes the passive connotation of the word, for this ultimate goal would be attributed by someone to something or someone else (pp. 52-54). It is in that last sense that word occurs in the expression “*Die Bestimmung des Menschen*”, and it is by means of this use of the word – closely related to its affinity to the words “destination” in French and “purpose” in English and to the theological debates within which they were employed (p. 63) – that the concept of *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* acquires its preeminence.

However, here should be noted that, while Macor convincingly shows that this last meaning is the meaning more clearly present and employed in the expression “*Die Bestimmung des Menschen*”, the relationship of this meaning with the other meanings of the word – namely the first meaning of “defining” and the second one of “property” – cannot be disregarded and is of profound philosophical significance. As a matter of fact, as Macor herself shows later on in the book, the question about the relationship between the first and the last meaning of the word – between “defining” or “deciding” and being “destined to” – will be of profound

philosophical meaning, leading to one of the most meaningful changes in the history of the concept. With this in mind, though, it seems unfortunate, even if understandable, due to the length of the task taken by the book, that the connection of the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen* with the meaning of *Bestimmung* as property is hardly explored in it – but more on this topic later on.

Moving to Chapter Two of the book, Macor writes about the official introduction and establishment of the concept by means of Johann Joachim Spalding's *Betrachtung über die Bestimmung des Menschen*. Searching for a renovation of Christian religion and theology and inspired by his contact with Sack (who first used the expression "Die Bestimmung des Menschen" in a sermon of 1735) and by the reading and translation of Shaftesbury's<sup>2</sup> works, Spalding writes his book, a monologue of a fictive "I" who is trying to find out his "*Bestimmung*", why he is here and what he is meant to do. In order to find his *Bestimmung*, the fictive I searches and examines his own conscience, guided by his natural, moral feeling, which serves as the judge of whether one or other aspect of his conscience provides a satisfactory answer to what his *Bestimmung* is or if he should keep searching something beyond the sphere of the aspects already examined. The fictive I goes through a series of stages, each closer to his *Bestimmung* than the latest one, going from sensibility, passing through religion and finally reaching immortality, until he understands that his *Bestimmung* is that of immortality, of eternal life in another world, so he can fully realize his capacity to self-improvement, which could never be fully achieved only in this life (pp. 88-94). Thus, by appealing to a conception of religion which is based on the natural, moral feeling accessible to each and everyone regardless of theoretical, doctrinal and theological disputes, Spalding hoped to provide an existential anchoring to Christian religion which would not only make it accessible beyond the confines of theological scholars, but also provide means by which the deistic vs. revealed religion debate could be solved, by showing that our natural, moral feelings, while indeed enough to show us the true religion, also show that this is the Christian religion (p. 96). In that way, Spalding inaugurated a renovation of Christian theology which would make the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen* one of the most used and most discussed concepts of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, being at the center not only of many of the theological, but also philosophical discussions of the time – to the extent that Kant and Fichte themselves would at some point both say that the ultimate goal of philosophy is to bring man to the knowledge of his *Bestimmung*<sup>3</sup>.

After showing the official introduction of the concept, Macor moves, in Chapter 3, to its initial reception. As it was to be expected, orthodox Lutheran theologians, such as Johann Melchior Goeze and Johann Martin Chladenius, received the concept very critically. Both critics, although different in their approach, would point out Spalding's distancing from core orthodox Lutheran ideas and dogmas, such as that man is too weak, due to the original sin, to be able to know his own *Bestimmung* without assistance of revelation, or that one is not to be judged by his works or his actions, but rather by his faith, and that his salvation is pre-destined by God. However, one of the most interesting critics comes from Chladenius, for it is a critic regarding the term *Bestimmung* itself. For Chladenius, *Bestimmung* is an inappropriate term for describing the ultimate goal of man, for it focuses rather on the one who is destined (man) than on the one who has destined (God), attributing to the former properties he does not have<sup>4</sup>,

while also being too generic of a term to be able to describe man's special place and purpose (for also animals, plants etc. can be said to have a *Bestimmung*). Instead, Chladenius argues, one should use the term *Beruf*, for, contrary to *Bestimmung*, it points directly to the will of God as being the condition of possibility of the realization of man's ultimate purpose (p. 129). In other words, while the term *Bestimmung* tends to focus on man, on its nature that could be accessible without direct reference to the destining instance (that is, without the revelation of God) but rather immediately known on itself, the term *Beruf* would focus on the instance that determines man, for *Beruf* always points out that the "called" instance is called into fulfilling its goal by someone else (namely God). Thus, Chladenius deems *Bestimmung* to be a deistic term, while only *Beruf* would be the properly Christian term to describe the relationship between God and man.

However, as Macor points out, what was seen as scandalous by the orthodox Lutherans in the concept was precisely what was seen by many others as its potential, Spalding of course among them, to bring a much needed reform to Christian theology and religion (p. 130). It is no wonder then that Spalding replies to his critics claiming that either their interpretation of the dogmas they claim to defend is mistaken, or that no reasonable and meaningful conception of religion would be able to sustain them. Regarding the dogma of *Rechtfertigung* (that it is the faith and not the works that brings one closer to God), Spalding sustains that it should be interpreted historically, for what Luther meant when he claimed that it was faith and not works that brought one to God was that superstitious rituals didn't bring any closer to God. But faith, as Spalding argues, cannot be separated and must be expressed in one's own actions and life (p. 135). Regarding the dogma of the original sin, on the other hand, Spalding also claimed that such a dogma was not worth of a fair conception of God, for a really good God would never make one pay for a sin he has not himself committed and condemn man to not being able to find happiness and salvation by means of his own actions (p. 137). In short, only a new conception of religion, one which wouldn't prioritize theological preciousities over providing a way, accessible to everyone, to know the true religion and to be able to realize one's ultimate goal, the goal of happiness and deliverance, could bring Christian religion the renovation it sorely needed (p. 139).

Thus, Chapter 4 brings us to the positive reception on these grounds from Spalding's work, in Berlin and Zurich, by Johann Georg Sulzer, Christoph Martin Wieland and Johann Kaspar Lavater. Sulzer, the first one to contribute to the dissemination of the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen*, attaches to the concept, in his *Versuchs einiger Moralischen Betrachtungen über die Werke der Natur*, a consideration about nature, expanding the concept of *Bestimmung* and applying it not only for man, but also for animals and things in general. Here one can see that it is precisely what Chladenius had criticized about the concept that becomes, for Sulzer, fundamentally good in it, for the constitution of animals and of things, and also of "creatures of understanding and their properties"<sup>5</sup> showed the necessity of a Creator responsible for the harmony of each being with the *Bestimmung* of their species (p.144). The fact thus that the concept could be used to show not only of humans, but of all creation in general that they have a purpose and a role to fulfill becomes one of the strong suits of the concept, rather than something to be criticized on it. Furthermore, Wieland and Lavater will take further the demands posed

by this new conception of religion and its support on reason and on man's capacity to know his own *Bestimmung*. Wieland, as a matter of fact, will defend that natural religion must be the *ground* of religion, while revealed, Christian religion must be its necessary supplement, for one could not be certain of the truth of natural religion without the assistance of the revealed one (pp. 148-149). Lavater, on his turn, will even further argue that one should not accept any beliefs which cannot be proved rationally, and thus that dogmas of religion – such as the dogma of the original sin or of pre-destination – should be accepted or rejected based on what extend they agree with reason (pp. 154-155). This also shows, however, the tension clearly brought by Spalding's work between reason and revelation, nature and God's mercy (i.e. whether man is by nature capable of reaching his own determination or needs God's assistance in order to do it).

It is this tension which will ultimately lead to the separation between man's worldly *Bestimmung* and his eternal *Bestimmung*, discussed in the third part of the book. That is when, as exposed before, the concept will go through one of its most significant changes, namely that of acquiring a moral-philosophical dimension. Due to Thomas Abbt objections to the concept of *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, the separation between the first and the third sense of *Bestimmung* – that is, between “bestimmen” as determining oneself to a specific behavior and “Bestimmtsein” as being determined or destined by something to have a place in the whole of existence – is brought to the order of the day (pp. 161-162). It is impossible, according to Abbt, to know of our *Bestimmung* in the latter sense, and absurd to pretend that this life should be a preparation for another, eternal life, believing that, somehow, man is capable of endless self-improvement and thus is meant to continue to improve himself beyond his worldly life. How could this life be the preparation for another life, if the premature death of infants made it impossible to conceive in what way this life could have been for them a preparation for the next one? And how could Spalding pretend that his considerations on the *Bestimmung des Menschen* were something that any man could conclude and find in their own selves, if not all men were in the position Spalding, a instructed, cultured European man, was to analyze their own consciences as Spalding's fictional I does? It was arrogance and even historical naivety that would lead to the belief that one could know one's transcendent *Bestimmung*, one's role in the whole of existence. This, according to Abbt, however, should not be reason for despair; for although man cannot know his eternal *Bestimmung*, he is still in full condition of knowing how he ought to act *in this life*, despite not knowing anything of a life after this one. For this reason, one should abandon the pursuit of our transcendent, theological, eternal *Bestimmung*, of our “*Bestimmtsein*”, and focus on acting morally in this world, in this life, and thus in our moral *Bestimmung*, in the “*Bestimmen*” in the sense of the determining of our actions and behavior (pp. 164-165).

Moses Mendelssohn, however, will try to defend and stand by Spalding's conception of the *Bestimmung des Menschen*, arguing that man is always improving himself, whether consciously or not and already from the very moment of gestation. Thus, there is no life that is so short or so flawed that it does not contribute to one's self-improvement, and no cultured, instructed conscience of that *Bestimmung* would be necessary in order to fulfill it (p. 175).

Abbt's and Mendelssohn's discussion, and the fact that they ultimately would stand fast

on their own positions on the subject (also partly due to Abbt's death before Mendelssohn's publication of the continuation of this debate, his *Phädon*), however, reinforced, rather than weakened, the distinction between *Bestimmung* as *Bestimmen* and as *Bestimmtsein*, a distinction which is further shown in Chapter VI by Schiller's initial acceptance of the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen* and his later doubts and refusal of the concept. In fact, Schiller's doubts would not only in many regards be similar and based on Abbt's considerations, but would even radicalize them. On the one hand, Schiller would deny, by means of materialistic considerations, the existence of a eternal *Bestimmung* (p. 196). On the other hand, he would further asseverate that to be a moral being consists precisely is being independent of anything else other than one's own moral nature, in such a way that to act morally or to be virtuous requires no grounding in any other *Bestimmung* than man's very own moral nature (p. 199).

In Chapter VII, however, we see how Kant neutralizes the distinction between *Bestimmen* and *Bestimmtsein* by claiming that man is destined to self-determination: *Die Bestimmung zur Selbstbestimmung*. Kant achieves this impressive philosophical feat of uniting two apparently irreconcilable conceptions of *Bestimmung* by means of his concept of reason and autonomy. Kant grants Abbt's point that man is not in position to theoretically know his *Bestimmung* in the sense of *Bestimmtsein*, and thus that man had only really access to his own *Bestimmung* in the practical, moral sense of *Bestimmen*. However, precisely because to act morally, that is, to be autonomous, implies following the ethical law regardless of considerations on one's own happiness, man can only fulfill his *Bestimmung* as an ethical agent by not being able to know his *Bestimmtsein*, to know God and God's will and to know that immortality awaits. For, if that was the case, man would act according to the ethical law only in order to achieve happiness, and not for the sake of the ethical law alone; he would act in order to do what he thinks he has to do to satisfy God's will and achieve happiness in an immortal life, and not merely because the categorical imperative, the ethical law, demands him to act ethically regardless of the consequences of his actions to his happiness (pp. 210—211). Thus, he would fail to fulfill his *Bestimmung* as a moral agent, and so his theoretical ignorance of immortality, God and what lies beyond is not something that hinders, but actually precisely that which makes it possible for man to realize his true *Bestimmung* as an ethical being (p.211). By conceiving in that way the relationship between *Bestimmen* and *Bestimmtsein*, Kant "insists on the moral duty of man not *despite* (as was the case in Abbt and Schiller), but rather *on the grounds* of his proper *Bestimmung*" (p.212). In other words, it is not that man can fulfill his moral *Bestimmung*, despite not knowing his true, eternal *Bestimmung*, but rather that his *Bestimmung* is to be moral, and thus his *Bestimmung* is *Selbstbestimmung*—his role and his purpose, his *Bestimmtsein* is precisely that of being a moral agent, and thus *Bestimmtsein* and (*sich selbst*) *Bestimmen* become identical.

By pointing out this fascinating innovation in the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen*, in Kant, Macor indicates not only a key moment in the development of the concept, but also, in the opinion of this reviewer, in the development of German Idealism itself. In fact, it does not seem too much of a stretch to say that one of the key projects of German Idealism as a whole was nothing but to find the best way to conceive *die Bestimmung des Menschen als Selbstbestimmung*, or, in other words, to think of freedom as the ground of our actions

and of our knowledge, to conceive man as being fundamentally free. Here, Macor shows that this philosophical project of conceiving freedom as the ground of our actions and our knowledge simply cannot be separated from the role the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen* had in the philosophy of Kant in particular and in the philosophers of German Idealism in general. That this is the case shows that more research is needed not only in the role that the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen*, but also the concept of *Bestimmung* in general played in German Idealism and in how they conceived of freedom as *Selbstbestimmung*. Only by means of this work could one uncover some of the truly fundamental presuppositions that lie behind the systems and the philosophical projects of these philosophers, not only in regard to their practical but also their theoretical views, and moreover in regard to how both these dimensions of their philosophies are connected.

Moving to part IV of the book, Macor discusses here the philosophical-historical expansion of the concept started by Herder. Herder attempts to conceive of the concept not only in an individual sense, but also, and therein lies his innovation, in regard to humanity as a species, and to relate man's *Bestimmung* as an individual and his *Bestimmung* as a part of his species. Herder sees this complementation of the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen* as needed due to what he considers to be the lack of "historical sensibility" both of Spalding and of his defender Mendelssohn, which, precisely because of their lack of historical reflection, do not manage to think of a *Bestimmung* that could be truly universal and apply to all individuals in all times and places (pp. 236-237). In order to achieve such a conception of *Bestimmung* capable of applying universally to all individuals, each individual's *Bestimmung* must be understood within the role they play for humanity's *Bestimmung* as a *species*, within their context and their time, and to the progress of the species as a whole, from which each individual is a part (p. 241). However, as Herder himself noticed, this ran the risk of subordinating the individual entirely to the species, and moreover would make it so that not all individuals could fulfill their *Bestimmung*, if they were meant to serve just as a means for the species to later on achieve its *Bestimmung*. That is why Herder first conceives of a reciprocal difference between species and individual, in which the species requires the individuals just as much as the individuals require the species, although the function of the individual remains only that of contributing to fulfilling the *Bestimmung* of the species (p. 243).

Ultimately seeing this answer as unsatisfactory, as well as an idea of a linear progress that would also mean to deprive some individuals and cultures of being capable of fulfilling their *Bestimmung*, Herder finally conceives of a truly reciprocal dependence between the *Bestimmung* of the species and the *Bestimmung* of the individual, conceiving that part and whole are both the sense-giving and the sense-receiving instances of the historical process (p. 245). Although no one can know what is the plan of the whole, although we remain ignorant of this plan, of why we are here, still the species is there to allow the individual to fulfill his *Bestimmung* as well as the individual makes his necessary contribution for the species to realize its *Bestimmung*. Moreover, this accomplishment of species' and individual's *Bestimmung* is not submitted to a linear progress, but rather to a development that is not a progress, but merely the provision of scenes, of contexts in which each individual and culture can, at their own time, fulfill their own *Bestimmung*. In that way, Herder conceives of a development

without progress (like the branches of a tree or the streams of a river), in which everyone can fulfill their *Bestimmung* because that *Bestimmung*, to each individual and culture, is just to perform their task, to do what they are meant to do in their specific context and time (p. 247).

Thus, it would seem that Herder managed to establish a balance, however instable, between individual and species in his conception of *Bestimmung des Menschen*. However, as we see in Chapter IX, Kant would return to the discussion of the concept, this time by completely undoing this balance and subordinating again the individual to the species. Unlike animals, Kant would say, who can fully develop all their capacities within the span of their lives, humans, as rational beings, are capable of infinite self-improvement, an improvement which they could never completely fulfill in their finite lives. Thus, in the case of humans, as rational finite beings, the individual was incapable of fulfilling his *Bestimmung* of fully developing all his capacities, which is why this task had to be left to the *species as whole*. Only the species as a whole, and ultimately only the last generation of humanity could truly fulfill its *Bestimmung*, and all the individuals and all previous generations only have to provide their specific, limited contribution to that ultimate fulfillment by the last generation (p. 250). In such a way, Kant substitutes Spalding's individual fulfillment of his *Bestimmung* in the next world by the fulfillment of the species' *Bestimmung* in this world, to which the individual is subordinated.

Needless to say, such a conception was severely criticized by those that either saw the *Bestimmung des Menschen* as being purely individual, as in the case of Mendelssohn, or thought that the individual's *Bestimmung* could not be sacrificed or entirely subordinate to the species' *Bestimmung*, as Herder. This is why, Mendelssohn, on the one hand, will criticize the idea of a linear historical progress, claiming that history is circular (p. 254) and that the species, society or the state are just abstractions which cannot fulfill any *Bestimmung*, but rather serve just as means for the individual to fulfill his *Bestimmung* (p. 256). On the other hand, Herder will consider both Kant's and Mendelssohn's positions as one-sided: if there is no doubt there is an education (*Erziehung*) of humanity, only individuals, however, can be educated, and to think that the individual can be entirely subordinated to the species would amount to averroism (p. 260). However, this education can only take place within a society, within a relationship among individuals of the same kind, by means of tradition and transmission (p.262). Thus, not only the *Bestimmung* of humanity as a species requires the individuals, but also the individuals require the species to fulfill their *Bestimmung* – both presuppose one another and cannot be reduced to one another.

This discussion will continue further, with Kant holding fast to the subordination of the individual to the species and defending that the species can indeed be capable in itself of a *Bestimmung* that each individual separately cannot (p. 262). Yet, Macor shows interesting developments that go beyond this debate between Kant, Mendelssohn and Herder, such as in Schiller's and in Schelling's takes on the new, philosophical-historical conception of the concept.

Schiller, as in the last time, firstly receives the concept with enthusiasm, seeing in it the possibility of fulfilling man's *Bestimmung* in this very world (pp. 268-269). However, later on, he also criticizes the one-sided subordination of the individual to the species in his *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*. There he claims that, while it was no doubt necessary that the individual would specialize himself for the sake of the development of the species, and thus sacrifice the harmony of all his capacities in himself, this state was ultimately inadmissible. One had now to conceive of a technic by means of which this state could be overcome – precisely the aesthetical education, which would enable man to fully develop once again in harmony all of his capacities (pp. 275-276). Further on, however, in his *On the sublime*, Schiller will show even more skeptical doubts about the possibility that history can assure the progress of science and of the human species, for a close look on history would rather show the perpetual battle between the forces of nature and human freedom (p.276).

Schelling is also an interesting case, especially for those interested in German Idealism and its relationship to this concept. In fact, in his early years and in his dissertation for the *Magister*, he attempts to conceive of a relationship of species and individuals in a Leibnizian way, so that individual mirrors the whole, and just as individuals have a process of aging, so does the humanity as a whole. In that scenario, the ultimate goal of all individuals and civilizations would be to build a purely rational order governed by rational laws, in which human beings could forsake their sensible chains (p.286).

Ultimately, however, and as an interesting conclusion to this part of the book, Macor's shows not only Kant's late critics to Mendelssohn's conception of a circular history, but perhaps more interestingly a critic, on Kantian grounds, of Kant's subordination of the individual to the species. For, as the theologian Immanuel G. Berger would astutely note, if all the individuals of all generations of humanity but the last one are meant to serve just as means to enable the last generation to fulfill their *Bestimmung*, then all previous generations and individuals are being treated merely as *means*, and not as *an end in themselves*, which would clearly contradict the principles of Kant's moral philosophy (pp.292-293).

Finally, in the last part of book, we come to the exhausting of the concept and its decline to a mere slogan. Despite Spalding's last and valorous attempts to adapt his work to the newest philosophical developments of Kant's transcendental philosophy, Fichte's ultimate, unique contribution to the concept and his own adaptation for the sake of his own version of transcendental philosophy will ultimately, and paradoxically, also lead to its exhaustion. The reason behind this fact, Macor says, lies in how, in Fichte, the *Bestimmung des Menschen* is replaced with the *Beruf des Menschen*, with the profession man exerts in society (p. 295). In his first book on the topic, *Die Bestimmung des Gelehrten* ("The Destination of the Scholar", also translated as "The Vocation of the Scholar"), Fichte, seeing early approaches of the concept as being too abstract (even when philosophical-historically thought), tries to think of that *Bestimmung* concretely, that is, in relationship to the concrete role man has within society (p. 313). Thus, he begins from the *Bestimmung des Menschen* in general and then goes through progressively more concrete stages of consideration of that *Bestimmung*, namely in society, in the different posts (*Stands*) in society and finally specifically in the post of a scholar, a *Gelehrte*.

Thus, in this conception, in order for one to fulfill one's *Bestimmung*, all one has to do is to perform his role in society, the role of this post, making the contribution he's meant to do to it in this post. This means ultimately, however, that the *Bestimmung des Menschen* is nothing more than his *Beruf*, his profession in society, and thus, the concept of *Bestimmung* would be exhausted and give place to the concept of *Beruf* instead, not only linguistically but also philosophically (p. 316).

Fichte also discusses the concept for one last time in his book, named after Spalding's book, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, meant to be his definitive answer to the *Atheismustreit* that ultimately took him out of Jena and into a new phase in his philosophy. There, following the model of Spalding's work, a fictive I questions himself about what is his *Bestimmung* and goes through different, each more elevated than the last stages of conscience until he finally grasps what his true *Bestimmung* is (p. 321). At first (in the first book, "Doubt"), the fictive I sees himself unable to decide between a purely deterministic explanation of what he is, which would deprive him of freedom, and between his immediate conscience of himself as free (p. 322). The fictive I is then visited by a spirit (in the second part of the book "Knowledge"), which by means of a socratic dialogue with the fictive I on the origin of his knowledge of the objects and of his way of thinking about them, shows the fictive I that he is actually the condition and the ground of all reality that is known to him, and thus that he cannot be determined by it, but rather is the one that determines it (p. 323). This, however, while establishing the fictive I's freedom in the face of that reality, also makes it meaningless for him, nothing more than the interplay of shadows and representations with no substance, and thus gives the fictive I no satisfying answer regarding his *Bestimmung*. Finally, the spirit leaves the fictive I and, in the last part of the book (Faith, *Glaube*), the fictive I, trying to find a way through which he can recover the sense of reality in his dialogue with the spirit, realizes that that sense cannot be recovered by knowledge alone, but rather only by faith and by a moral imperative to treat the world and other rational beings as real (p.324).

It's ultimately listening to this voice of conscience that the fictive I grasps his *Bestimmung*, which is no other than to listen to this voice of his conscience and obey it. This means, in other words, to work with other rational beings to construct a realm of the rational law. This realm, in its turn, is in a sense already present wherever there are rational beings (and thus not a realm that can only be enjoyed by future individuals or generations), but can only be reached by acting rationally in the sensible world and in order to be freed from it. Thus, the latter should only be considered a school for the next life, and merely the beginning of our existence (p. 325).

And so, as Macor argues, Fichte's last work on the concept shows how he takes into consideration all phases of the development of the concept, from the religious (the life in a supersensible world of rational beings) to the moral (the practical imperative of man's inner conscience to act in this world and treat it and other rational beings in it as real) to the historical-philosophical (the construction of a rational order, of a realm of the rational beings by means of the work with other rational beings in society). However, although Fichte contemplates all these dimensions of the concept, giving his own original contribution to each of them and

even, in a way, trying to sustain its actuality (in contrast to his first reduction of the concept to the *Beruf des Menschen*), he fails to convince others of his Spalding's heritage (which was a key point in his defense against the accusation of atheism), and ultimately thus contributes, both with his first and his last book on the subject, to the decline of the concept to a mere slogan and to its substitution for *Beruf* (p. 328).

After exposing Fichte's final contribution to the concept, Macor makes some final considerations of the afterlife of the concept and of its vast cultural influence up to the end of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even to contemporary theological debate, where the concept, even after losing its philosophical pregnancy, remained relevant. Even more interestingly, Macor also concludes with the remarkable observation that concept of *Bestimmung*, earlier seen a heterodox by orthodox Lutheran theologians, which gave preference to the term *Beruf* (as seen with Chladenius), actually becomes the orthodox concept later on, while *Beruf* becomes the heterodox concept, around 60 years after Chladenius first raised his objections (p. 334). Remarkably, this was due to the fact that *Beruf* should imply choice and activity in the part of the one who is called to, while *Bestimmung* indicates the passivity and lack of choice of that of which it is *Bestimmung* of, and thus was deemed a better expression of the orthodox protestant view of man's relationship with God. As Macor concludes, "the many-layered connections between theology, philosophy and language could hardly be any clearer" in the rise, development, fall and even ultimate inversion of the concept (p. 335)

Macor's book thus shows, to this reviewer's mind very convincingly, the relevance and the pregnancy of the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen* to German's Enlightenment. It connects the concept with key moments of the development of this philosophical movement (such as the debate between Moses Mendelssohn and Thomas Abbt) and to central ideas of some of its core figures (such as Kant and his notion of *Selbstbestimmung*, fundamental to the whole German Idealism, or Fichte's development of his early and late philosophy). Moreover, with its massive historiographical and philological work, it provides abundant evidence of the relevance of the concept for the movement in which it played a role, regardless of what we came to see as the heritage of that movement. But also and not less so should Macor's philosophical work be praised, for she manages to trace a clear history of the philosophical development of this concept – a considerable feat, given the vastness of the concept's development and the richness of its many meanings.

Seen as a whole, indeed, Macor's book could be understood as showing us the following philosophical conceptual history: the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen* begins as a theological concept meant to bridge the gap between reason and revelation, natural and revealed religion, by providing man a natural, universal, understandable means by which he could ultimately find the meaning of his own existence. However, the tense relationship between the *Bestimmung* as something that we can know in this life and by our mundane means and the *Bestimmung* as something that is eternal and goes beyond this life leads to a breach between the two conceptions *Bestimmungen*, a rupture meant to ensure that even if we cannot know our ultimate, eternal *Bestimmung*, still, we could know what our *Bestimmung in this life* is, and, within this boundaries, find a meaning to our existence. Hence, the moral-

philosophical turn of the concept, which now does not describe our eternal *Bestimmung* in the sense of *Bestimmtsein*, of the role we, as parts, play in the whole of existence as planned by God – something too uncertain and too hard to sustain that we could ever have a knowledge of – but rather in the sense of *Bestimmen*, of our capacity to lead our lives morally in this world and which should be more than enough for us to know how we should conduct ourselves in our lives. Finally with Kant, this moral *Bestimmung* becomes such an importance, that it is also ultimately identified – and reconciled – with the *Bestimmung* in the sense of the *Bestimmtsein*: our part in this world is nothing other than to act morally, and this moral acting is precisely the role we are supposed to fill.

However – and we confess here to be speculating a little ourselves, based on Macor's exposition on the theme – this leaves us anyway, at first, only with the *Bestimmen*, with the fact that we can know how we ought to individually, *morally* act, but without having any conception of what our place in a bigger whole is, or what is our individual contribution to the bigger scheme of things. Even Kant's identification from *Bestimmtsein* with *Bestimmen* means at the end that we are left only with *Bestimmen*, that our *Bestimmung* is reduced to our individual and moral acting, without any thinking of our specific contribution to a greater whole would be by that means. Thus, even in Kant's reconciliation of the both *Bestimmungen*, we are left without a satisfying answer regarding our *Bestimmtsein*, regarding the reassurance that our actions contribute to a greater whole, a greater plan. However, since the possibility of finding this place in a bigger whole *beyond* this world was severely compromised by the previous debate, it had to be found now *in this world*. Thus, we come to the philosophical-historical development of the concept, where the whole in which man is to find his *Bestimmung* in the sense of *Bestimmtsein* acquires the figure of a this-worldly whole, namely of the *species* and of the *development* of the species.

However, this brings a new tension to the concept, akin to the previous tension, namely the tension between the *Bestimmung* as something individual *Bestimmung* as something that belongs to the species. The tension, one could argue, remains fundamentally the same as before, only in a philosophical-historical shape; for it is nothing other than the tension between a *Bestimmung* that the individual can find in himself and that is for himself and the *Bestimmung* that must be found somewhere beyond the individual and which is not immediately accessible for him or about him, but rather about the realization of bigger whole in which the individual is only a part. It is this tension, which was first avoided by the moral-philosophical turn of the concept but came back with its philosophical-historical development, that Herder tries to solve by reconciling the two different *Bestimmungen*, and that Moses and Kant attempt to solve by submitting and reducing one of the *Bestimmungen* altogether to the other one, whether the individual to the species (as in Kant) or the species to the individual (as in Mendelssohn).

Finally, one could argue, again based on Macor's work, that it is with Fichte's contribution that this tension is brought to an end but, at the same time, precisely because of that, the concept loses its power and pregnancy and declines to a mere slogan. By identifying *Bestimmung* with *Beruf*, Fichte solves – again by this reviewer's understanding, based however in Macor's exposition – the tension in the concept by eliminating any kind of reference it could

have to a dimension of this *Bestimmung* which was not and could not be accessible for the individual: all the individual had to know and to do in order to fulfill his *Bestimmung*, both as an individual and in regard to a greater whole, was to perform his profession in society. Conceiving *Bestimmung* as *Beruf*, Fichte manages to make it so that not only the individual has access to his individual *Bestimmung*, but also can fully know what his role is in the bigger whole – something that is unprecedented in the previous authors, for all of them conceived, in one way or another, that the role individual played in the bigger scheme of things was ultimately unknowable for him, whether this bigger whole was God's plan or the development of the species. All he could know was, at most, that, as an individual, he was meant to have his part in a bigger plan, but not in what this part consisted or in what the plan itself consisted. Yet, with Fichte, at least in the *Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten*, not only the individual knows how he ought to act in order to fulfill his *Bestimmung*, but also in what way his actions contributed to a bigger whole – that of society -, for they consisted in nothing else than his contribution in his profession, in his *Beruf*.

However, it's precisely the ultimate dissolution of this tension in the concept between the side of one's *Bestimmung* that is fully accessible to one's own self as an individual and the side that is beyond his reach as something regarding a greater whole that ultimately exhausts the concept, for it was precisely this tension that allowed the concept to work simultaneously as a way of bridging reason and revelation, nature and religion. No wonder then that Fichte failed to convince his critics of his filiation to Spalding, despite trying to defend the actuality of the concept of *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* in his book with the same name and despite attempting, in a way, to come back from the reduction of *Bestimmung* to *Beruf*. No wonder also that, later on, the concept of *Bestimmung* would become the orthodox protestant concept, while that of *Beruf* would be claimed to be the heterodox one. For the pregnancy of the concept lied precisely in its ambivalence, in its capacity to work both as a way to provide man some sphere of autonomy and of action while, at the same time, grounding this sphere in something that lies beyond man's actions and his grasp of them.

Thus, Macor's book delivers a fascinating, one could say even enthralling history of a concept, a history which left deep marks in German Philosophy and thought and which is indispensable for understanding some of its deepest and far-reaching ideas and their consequences.

And yet, as gigantic a work as Macor's has done, one still must concede that there is much left to be done. For, as we briefly mentioned before, the connection between the "practical" and the "theological" senses of *Bestimmung* – of "deciding" and of "being destined or meant to" - with the "theoretical" senses of the word – of "property" or even of "defining" (in a theoretical sense) is hardly, if ever, discussed by Macor's work. Yet, this seems to us to be one of great relevance, especially for understanding some of the most important developments in German Idealism from Kant to Hegel. As a matter of fact, in Kant's pre-critical writing *Nova Dilucidatio*, the intimate relationship of these different senses is shown in a very interesting way: for there, *bestimmen* is defined (theoretically) by Kant as the act of attributing a predicate, with exclusion of its opposite, to a subject, by means of a *ground* which thus determines the

subject<sup>6</sup>. It is by means of this act that a subject receives a predicate, that is, a property, a determination, a *Bestimmung* in the sense of *Eigenschaft*. However, in order for something to be determined not only in regard to our knowledge, but also in regard to its reality, it must have a *ground* outside of it for it to be determined by the predicate it is determined<sup>7</sup>. And, according to the principle of *determining reason* (“*Satz des bestimmenden Grundes*”) – a correction Kant deems necessary of the formulation of the principle of *sufficient reason*<sup>8</sup> – everything that is determined must have a ground for its determination. Yet, if that is true how could man be truly free, that is, *determine his own self*? According to Kant, this problem would be solved, if one were to understand that while God, being the ultimate ground of all determinations of things, also no doubt determines man, he also simultaneously determines man in such a way that he is the one who determines his own actions by means of his will – in other words, God determines (or destines) man to self-determine himself<sup>9</sup>. Thus one sees one important example of how the theoretical senses – of “defining” and of “properties” relate to the practical meaning of *Bestimmung* (“how can man determine himself”) and to the question about its possibility, which is answered with the theological sense of *Bestimmung* (“God determines man to self-determination”).

Furthermore, while this example shows one early case of the intricate relationship between the theoretical, the practical and the theological senses of the concept, Fichte’s *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* could also be perfectly used to exemplify a late case of such a connection, one which shows how Fichte does not even clearly separate those different meanings. As a matter of fact, it is significant in that regard that, in the first part of the book, the one called “Doubt”, the question the fictive I poses about his own *Bestimmung* is at first answered by means of an deterministic-natural explanation of how a being comes to have the properties it has, and by the fact that everything is *thoroughly determined, durchgängig bestimmt* (an expression also often used by Kant), that is, has exactly the determinations, the properties it has in the grade that it has them<sup>10</sup>. Not only that, Macor mentions in her work several moments in which the sense of *Bestimmung* as *Eigenschaft* was clearly connected to the other senses, although she does not explore this connection further<sup>11</sup>. However, it seems to us that precisely this connection between the practical, the theological and the theoretical brought by the concept of *Bestimmung* would be fundamental to understanding some of the most important ground ideas and presuppositions of German’s Enlightenment and particularly of German Idealism. In fact, recent research – including some of the other works of Macor<sup>12</sup> – on the role of the concept of *Bestimmung*, both in practical and theoretical senses, is slowly shedding some light in its relevance to German Idealism and to the development of some of its core ideas and systems<sup>13</sup>. Thus exploring deeper these connections would be of utmost significance for the research in this field, and maybe even for uncovering one fundamental, widely spread philosophical idea that might be of relevance to this day.

All those points seem to show that, while Macor’s work is no doubt an impressive contribution to the history of the concept of *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, the richness, vastness and depth of the concept will still demand many further researches, so one can more fully grasp in what way its many different meanings are connected and how the concept is of profound relevance to German Enlightenment as a whole. Not only that, it also shows that

there is a further concept and a further history to be researched: for, while it is true that the history of the concept of *Bestimmung* overlaps in great length with the history of the concept of *Bestimmung des Menschen*, it is also seems very likely true that the concept of *Bestimmung*, *on its own*, not only in its practical and theological, but also in its *theoretical* sense and, moreover in the way that all those senses connect (and maybe precisely in the fact that all the different senses establish a relationship between one term as a *ground* and another term as the *grounded*, or in other words between a determining and a determined instance), has an history of its own, which might well continue to be relevant to this day. Still, one could hardly find anything more praiseworthy to say about a book than that it not only shows much that we still did not know, but also that there's much yet to be known.

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## NOTE / NOTES

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2 It is also worth noting that Shaftesbury himself, as Macor shows in her book, would say that the question a man who wants to use to the best his understanding should try to answer would be about to what end he was made and to what way of acting man is destined due to his natural *properties* (p.87) – which shows that, even before its wide use in German Enlightenment, there was a precedent, intimate relationship between thinking about the ultimate goal of mankind and the properties of man, that is between the two meanings *Bestimmung* as *Endzweck* and as *Eigenschaft*.

- 3 See p. 202 and p. 312.
- 4 Which, again, also points to the relationship of *Bestimmung* as *Endzweck* with *Bestimmung* as *Eigenschaft*.
- 5 Another interesting example of the intimate relationship between *Bestimmung* as *Endzweck* und *Bestimmung* as *Eigenschaft*.
- 6 “Bestimmen heißt ein Prädikat mit Ausschluß seines Gegenteil setzen. Was ein Subjekt auf ein Prädikat bestimmt, nennt man den Grund.” (KANT, 2015, p. 423).
- 7 “Der Grund also bringt aus Unbestimmtem Bestimmtes zustande. Und da ja alle Wahrheit aus der Bestimmung eines Subjekts durch ein Prädikat zustandekommt, ist der bestimmende Grund nicht nur das Kennzeichen, sondern auch die Quelle der Wahrheit (...)” (Idem *ibid.*, p. 425).
- 8 Idem *ibid.*, p. 427.
- 9 Idem *ibid.* pp. 465-469.
- 10 See FICHTE, 2013, p. 35, and most remarkably: “*Alles, was da ist, ist durchgängig bestimmt; es ist, was es ist, und schlechthin nichts anderes.*”
- 11 See notes 1, 3 and 4.
- 12 See MACOR, 2015.
- 13 See for instance BREAZEALE 2003, EIDAM 2000, KEE 2004, 2009 and 2012 and MELAMED 2012.

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