

Dissertation Abstract
The Life of Virtue: Moral Progress and Kant's Idea of the Highest Good

Immanuel Kant discusses the idea of the highest good in several major texts, describing it as the total object of practical reason (*Critique of Practical Reason* [CPrR] 5:108), as a duty commanded by the moral law (*Critique of the Power of Judgment* [CJ] 5:450), and as an idea that leads inevitably to religion (*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* [RBMR] 6:6). As such, Kant's arguments regarding the highest good shed light on questions concerning the relationship between moral rules and practical life, the relative goodness of happiness and virtue, the harmony of freedom and nature, and the influence of morality on religious belief.

While scholars have come to agree *that* the highest good is an important element in Kant's moral philosophy, there is little consensus as to just *how* we should understand its role, or even as to just *what* the highest good is (Reath 1988, Guyer 2011, Moran 2012, Pasternack 2014). My project aims to (1) provide a unified account of the highest good's role in Kant's critical philosophy, and (2) resolve recalcitrant difficulties concerning the content of the idea of the highest good, as well as clarifying the status of Kant's arguments for belief in God and immortality. I argue that Kant's development of the idea of the highest good reveals the shape of human life governed by the moral law. For finite, rational beings of the sensible world, morality must take the form of an individual and communal progress.