

**EPICURUS AND KANT:
A COMPARISON OF THEIR ETHICAL SYSTEMS**

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ABSTRACT

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In this Study, the empiricist ethical system of Epicurus and idealist ethical system of Kant will be compared. Kant maintains that as Epicurus' ethics regards morality as a means for the attainment of happiness, it is nothing but a self-love ethics. He, for this reason, calls Epicurean morality "selfishness." According to Kant, the maxims of happiness can be known only through experience but he says, experience can never produce a law which is universal and necessary. He contends that as Epicurean ethics has happiness as its ultimate goal (i.e., the highest good), it cannot be able to produce an objective morality, valid for all rational beings. Kant, on the other hand, tries to found his ethical system on an a priori moral law of pure reason which borrows nothing from experience. This Study would, in a sense, be a defense of Epicurean ethical system against Kant's claims. The main argument of the thesis is that Epicurean ethics is not a self-love ethics, but rather a system which propounds happiness for all. I will be arguing that for Epicurus, one's own happiness is necessarily bound up with the happiness of others, and that his system is sound and consistent. I will also try to show that Kant is not successful in deducing a transcendently ideal (a priori) law of reason and that his system has some inconsistencies.

Keywords: Epicurus, Immanuel Kant, empiricist ethical system, idealist ethical system, moral philosophy, moral law, happiness, virtue, justice.

ÖZ

EPİKUROK VE KANT'IN: ETİK SİSTEMLERİNİN BİR KARŞILAŞTIRMASI

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Bu çalışmada Epikuros'un deneyci etik sistemi ile Immanuel Kant'ın idealist etik sistemi karşılaştırılacaktır. Kant, Epikuros'un ahlakı, mutluluğa ulaşmak için bir araç olarak gördüğünü söyleyerek, onun kişinin öz mutluluğunu temel alan bir sistem önerdiğini öne sürer ve bu nedenle Epikuros'un ahlakını bencil bir ahlak sistemi olarak niteler. Kant mutluluğa ulaşma yollarının deneyimle bilinebileceğini, ancak deneyden bir yasada zorunlu olarak bulunması gereken evrensellik ve zorunluluk niteliklerinin türetilmeyeceğini, bu nedenle Epikuros'un deneyci etik sisteminin akıl sahibi her varlık için geçerli bir ahlak yasası üretemeyeceğini iddia eder. Evrensel ahlak yasasının deneyden bağımsız, aşkın (idealist) bir şekilde türetilmesi gerektiğini söyleyerek, sistemini, saf akıldan bu şekilde türettiğini iddia ettiği ahlak yasası üzerine kurar. Bu çalışma, Epikuros etik sisteminin bir anlamda Kant'a karşı savunusudur. Çalışmanın temel argümanı, Epikuros'un etik sisteminde, bencillik üzerine kurulu bir ahlak önerilmediği, herkes için mutluluğun öngörüldüğü, mutluluk için erdemın gerekli bir koşul olarak sunulduğu ve sistemin kendi içinde tutarlı ve sağlam bir yapıda olduğu şeklindedir. Diğer taraftan Kant'ın her türlü deneyimden bağımsız bir ahlak sistemi kurma girişiminin başarılı olmadığı ve sunduğu sistemin iç tutarsızlıkla sakat olduğu bu çalışmanın diğer argümanı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Epikuros, Immanuel Kant, deneyci etik sistem, idealist etik sistem, ahlak felsefesi, ahlak yasası, mutluluk, erdem, adalet.

To Can Zeki

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this Study, I am going to compare the ethical system of a philosopher from ancient Greece, Epicurus (341-270 BC), with the ethical system of a philosopher from the enlightenment period, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). As a time interval of nearly two thousand years separates these two philosophers, there may arise some questions with regard to the degree of soundness of this comparison. May the problem of anachronism lame the comparison? Do extant writings of Epicurus enable us to depict an Epicurean ethics adequately enough? It will be helpful to begin with these questions and, try to seek some answers to them.

It is well known that Kant articulated his metaphysics of morality very comprehensively in various books and it is more or less clear what Kant says about ethics. But what about Epicurus? Are there enough indubitable sources from which we can learn the ethical system of Epicurus? Although in his *Life of Eminent Philosophers* Diogenes Laertius says that Epicurus had written more books than any other philosopher before him had, unfortunately there remain very few of these writings. Yet there is a general agreement among scholars of Epicurus on the authenticity of his extant writings. On the other hand, there is a comprehensive amount of secondary literature about Epicureanism. It can be said that despite some difficulties, the extant writings of Epicurus (with the help of other sources which expose Epicureanism; e.g. Lucretius, Diogenes Laertius, Cicero, Diogenes of Oenanda) enable us to get a somewhat clear picture of Epicurean ethics. In this Study, I will not hesitate to incorporate the ideas which are attributed to the Epicurean philosophy in these secondary sources into Epicurus' philosophy. A problem, or rather a difficulty, which may be encountered in a search about Epicurean philosophy is that, in his extant writings Epicurus exposes his views in short sayings or fragments and sometimes the context in which these sayings were voiced is not known directly. When these sayings are interpreted without regard to their relevant contexts, misleading conclusions would be inevitable which are common in the discussions about Epicurean ethics. Therefore, it is important to

comprehend the sayings or aphorisms in their true contexts and gather these separate fragments under a systematic and coherent whole. In this regard, i.e., to match sayings with their relevant contexts, the testimony of the secondary sources would be very helpful. Philosophers from Epicurean tradition and from rival philosophical schools have left a variety of sources, which are helpful in understanding Epicurus' philosophy. In this study, though I will stay loyal to Epicurus' own sayings while interpreting them, I will not hesitate, in a sense, to reconstruct Epicurus' ethical system. This means that, I am ready to welcome the claims about my own reconstructing of Epicurean ethics.

It is generally accepted that, his *Letter to Menoeceus* is, more or less, summarizing Epicurus' ethical views. Many books have been written about Epicurus' ethical theory. Epicurean ethics is either vehemently criticized and rejected as egoistic hedonism, or championed as a good precept for happiness. The French philosopher Pierre Gassendi wrote *Eight Books on the life and Manners of Epicurus* in 1647 and this book enjoyed great success in England and influenced many philosophers and writers, including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Walter Charleton (who is the author of *Epicurus' Morals*).¹ Again, we read from Kant's ethical writings that Kant himself dwells on the Epicurean ethical system with great emphasis. Epicurean ethics is the main target or rival of Kant throughout the *Critique of Practical Reason*. So it can be concluded that the huge time interval between two philosophers and the rarity of Epicurus' original writings are no impediment to a sound comparison between the ethical systems of Epicurus and Kant. Rather, as we will see, the comparison would be very fruitful. This comparison will enable us to see general structures, on the one hand, of an empiricist (materialist) ethical system, on the other hand, of a rationalist (idealist) ethical system. Doing this comparison, we would inevitably come to deal with some of the main problems of ethics.

¹ See, O'Connor, Eugene; "Introduction" to *Epicurus, The Essential Epicurus, Letters, principle Doctrines, Vatican Sayings, and Fragments*, trans. O'Connor, Eugene, Buffalo, N.Y, Prometheus Books, 1993, p.101

On what motives do human beings choose between different ways of action? Or as Kant puts it, what ought to be the determining ground of a moral action? What are the criteria for right actions? What, if any, is (or ought to be) the ultimate goal of life? Epicurus and Kant are, in many respects, diametrically opposed to each other in answering these questions. On the one hand, a philosopher who says that “pleasure is the beginning and the end of the blessed life. ... [F]rom it we begin every choice and avoidance, and we come back to it, using the feeling as yardstick for judging every good thing.”² On the other hand, a philosopher who vehemently rejects the idea that feelings can ever be a yardstick for judging what is morally good or bad, and contends that it is pure reason alone which, (without any intervention of the feelings), decides what is *good* or *evil*. On the one hand, a morality, which seems to be derived from the empirical conditions of human life, on the other hand a morality which is based on a priori universal law of pure reason and which for this reason rejects every kind of empirical justification. Moreover, this comparison would lead us to come face to face with some questions about the quiddity of *feelings* and of *reason*, in other words about human nature itself. Is there such an entity as ‘*feeling*’ which can be isolated from *reason* when we talk about human being, or is there such an entity or faculty as ‘*reason*’ which can be isolated or separated from feelings, i.e., as Kant puts it: “*pure reason*”? What is the nature of the tension between feelings and reason and is it resolvable? Or do these abstractions (separation) totally distort the reality about human nature?

Both Epicurus and Kant are system philosophers, i.e., their respective philosophies are somehow interlinked coherent wholes. In this regard, for example, their ‘theories of knowledge’ or ‘metaphysics of nature’ are significantly in relation with their ethical theories. Therefore, for a sound comparison some general aspects of their philosophies also have to be discussed in relevant contexts and in due

²Long, A.A., Sedley, D.N., *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, New York, Cambridge Uni. Press, 2003, p.114

depth and length. In accordance with these considerations, the task of the comparison will be performed as follows:

In Chapter 1, I will examine some general aspects of Epicurus' and Kant's philosophies respectively. In this regard, I will deal, briefly, with their respective conceptions of theory of knowledge and their views of the physical world. We will see how the problem of the free will (or freedom) has a central significance in the ethical theories of both philosophers. Again, in this chapter, we will try to understand how Epicurus sets down the *senses* as criteria for truth and *feelings* as criteria for choice and avoidance. As for Kant; in his view, "[r]eason alone can discern what is true and good; the rest of creation simply *is*. Reason is the ground of intelligibility, necessity and universality. ..."³ We will look at Kant's solution to the question that he himself poses: *How is a synthetic proposition possible a priori and why it is necessary?*⁴ As his answer to this question will be the foundation of his epistemology and will strongly determine his ethical theory, I will try to point out the importance of this solution more specifically for the a priori moral law of reason.

In Chapter 2, the general outlines of ethical theories of Epicurus and Kant will be given respectively. In this regard, we will see the importance of the concept of pleasure in Epicurus' ethical philosophy. According to him, ultimate goal of human beings is to live a tranquil life, a life in peace, (*ataraxia*) which is free from any bodily and mental disturbances. To secure a state of peace (both external peace and peace of mind), man has to acquire true knowledge of his/her nature, and of the physical world. By virtue of the knowledge of his/her true nature, he/she stops pursuing vain and unnecessary desires which may bring pain, and by virtue of the knowledge of the physical world he/she can dispel anxieties such as caused

³ Roger J. Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant's Moral Theory*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.95

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. A. Zweig, New York, Oxford, Oxford Uni. Press, 2002, p.245

by the fear of death. And to secure external peace, men have to erect a system of justice, which is nothing but an agreement based on mutual advantage. This system of justice, together with his conception of friendship, constitutes Epicurus' ethical system. It is noteworthy to point out that, in the task of the exposition of Epicurus' ethical system, I will not hesitate to reinterpret, and in a sense to reconstruct his ethical system, of course in the light of the logical consequences of his sayings. I will be arguing that far from being a selfish hedonistic ethical system, or an ethical system based on the motive of "one's own happiness" as Kant depicts it, it is a system which voices happiness for all.

Kant says that the practical task of reason is to produce a good will, i.e., to produce virtue. He thus refuses all kind of instrumentalist conceptions of morality and maintains that morality is good in-itself. Kant says that for any moral law to hold universally and necessarily for every rational being it must be non-empirical and thus be a product of pure reason. He asserts that an empiricist system, such as that of Epicurus, cannot produce any moral law. I will try to clarify how Kant deduces a priori moral law of reason, which he contends, is purely rational and whether he is successful in this deduction. While Kant criticizes Epicurus for his viewing morality as a means for happiness, and says that morality must be an end-in-itself he, himself later incorporates happiness in his ethical system, and argues that virtue and happiness together comprise the highest good, (*summum bonum*). However, he says that for the realization of the attainment of the highest good to be possible a postulation of endless progress (i.e., immortality of soul) and of a Supreme Being (i.e., God) is necessary.

In Chapter 3, I will perform a comparative discussion of both ethical systems. In this regard, I will examine the systematizations of on the one hand, of an atomist (materialist) ethical system, on the other hand, of an idealist ethical system. In this comparison, I will be seeking answers to a set of questions. What is the difference between Epicurus' and Kant's respective conceptions of human nature? How do they depict the *ultimate goal* or the *highest good* of life and in this regard, what is

the importance of morality for the attainment of this goal. How do men generate (or acquire) the concepts of *good* and of *evil*? How do Epicurus and Kant differ in the conception of the principles of action (i.e., moral laws)? Can there be a universal moral law, which can hold for every rational being? Does reason, without any intervention of feelings, (i.e., a priori and not empirically) have the power to legislate a moral law which suits every rational being alike as Kant contends, or rather is (moral) law a product of human conditions (i.e., a product of history) and thus has a relative (but not ideal) objectivity as Epicurus would argue? In short, in this chapter I will be examining the difference between a naturalistic conception of life which is devoid of any teleology and a “meaning (value)-loaded” and teleological conception of life. In other words, an empirical conception of “good and evil” which is ultimately based on feelings of pleasure and pain will be compared with a transcendently idealist conception of the good and evil, which is derived from a priori moral law of pure reason.

The main purpose of this study is to propose a defense of Epicurus’ ethical system as an empiricist atomist ethical system, which is described (and attacked) by Kant as a “self-love” ethics, or as “an ethics in pursuit of one’s own happiness” in his *Critique of Practical Reason*. Kant even sometimes equates Epicurean ethics (though not directly) with selfishness (egoism) and contends that such a conception of ethics cannot produce any morality. I will try to show that Epicurean morality cannot be viewed as a precept which serves only for one’s self interest or “one’s self-happiness” as Kant depicts it, but as a precept, which entails (and thus propounds) happiness for all. I will argue that for Epicurus the attainment of a tranquil life, (which he depicts as the ultimate goal of life), cannot be possible if the interest of others are infringed, in other words the happiness of others is a necessary condition for one’s own happiness. These considerations at hand, again I will be arguing that the ethical system of Epicurus is a rigorous and consistent ethical system whereas the ethical system of Kant has some inconsistencies.

CHAPTER II

2. SOME COMMON ASPECTS OF EPICURUS' AND KANT'S PHILOSOPHIES

The ethical systems of Epicurus and Kant at first glance seem to be diametrically opposed to each other. Nevertheless, they have various common aspects. Before the exposition of their ethical systems (which I am going to do in the next chapter) in this chapter I will, in the first place, dwell briefly on these common aspects of their philosophies, and then I will deal with some general points of their theories of knowledge and metaphysics of nature which, I think, will help us in understanding their ethical theories.

2.1. The Moral Self

As is well known for Plato and Aristotle man is an organic member of the society as is an organ in the body. Man can attain its moral perfectness in a justly organized political society. However, for both Epicurus and Kant moral man is an individual. Of course, this man can be a member of society but its moral perfectness is not an issue, which depends on the organization of the society. They contend that man, as an individual person, is responsible for all his conduct, and has all the means to secure or live a good life. Epicurus, even, advises that man should abstain from political interests, which according to him, are merely obstacles to a tranquil life. A famous Epicurean dictum, which sounds as an ascetic advice, is as follows: "Live your life without attracting attention."⁵ As for Kant, his moral individual is a self-sufficient rational being who can be a legislator of a moral law, which has validity for all rational beings. In other words Kant's individual, in his personality, represents all humanity: This individual must act in such a way that he always treat humanity, whether in his own personality or in the

⁵ Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus, Letters, principle Doctrines, Vatican Sayings, and Fragments*, trans. O'Connor, Eugene, Prometheus Books, 1993, p.101

person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.⁶

2.2. Against Skepticism

Both Epicurus and Kant rejected skepticisms of their times. “Democritus’ doubts about the validity of sense-perception had been developed into a full-scale skepticism by his fourth-century followers ... and the reversal of this trend in atomist philosophy is one of Epicurus’ principal goals.”⁷ First of all Epicurus starts with rejection of the skeptics’ assertion which says that ‘nothing can be known.’ The argumentation of Epicureanism is in fact very simple: if the skeptic asserts this proposition, he at least knows one thing. Then Lucretius, a devoted Epicurean of the Roman time, asks: “[G]iven that he has never before seen anything true in the world, from where does he get his knowledge of what knowing and not knowing are? What created the preconception of true and false? And what proved to him that doubtful differs from certain?”⁸ Therefore, according to the Epicurean philosophy, the self-refuting aspect of skepticism is obvious and no further evidence is needed for its denial.

In Epicurus’ view, “[t]he *preconception* [notion, concept] of *true* has its origin in the senses and ... the senses cannot be refuted.”⁹ The Epicurean philosophy treats sense perception as the first and the most reliable criterion for the truth. Epicurus claims that there can be found nothing more reliable than senses. As we know, Plato argues that senses cannot be relied upon as the sources of knowledge. According to him, that which can be attained through senses would only be the shadow of true knowledge. He asserts that true knowledge can be achieved only

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Law, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans., H.J. Paton, London, Routledge, 2005, p.106-7

⁷ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (a comment by Long and Sedley), p.83

⁸ *Ibid*, p.78

⁹ *Ibid*, (Lucretius) p.78 (Emphasis is added.)

through reason. Epicurus rejects this idea and claims that reason cannot be a reliable ground for knowledge because all it gets is through sensations. “Reason is in its entirety the product of the senses, so that if the senses are not true all reason becomes false as well.”¹⁰ He claims that whatever senses perceive are all true and it would be wrong to say that some sense impressions are true and some are false. We make judgments about our sense impressions. But impressions and opinions (judgments) about sense impressions are two different things in kind. Some opinions may be true and the others false. So, according to Epicurus, truth and falsity is not an aspect of the sense perceptions but that of opinions.

It is clear enough from the above words that Epicurus is an ancestor of modern British empiricism and David Hume is one of these British empiricists. But this time Kant has to deal with the skepticism which was posed by Hume. Following words of Kant are quoted from his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*: “[M]y recollection of David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction.”¹¹ As is known, David Hume has asserted that though the proposition ‘*every event has a cause*’ is taken as a necessarily true proposition, it cannot legitimately be inferred from experience. What is seen in experience is just the succession of two events and after a number of repetitions of these two events, which take place successively; it is illegitimately inferred that the first event is the cause of the second. So according to Hume what is accepted as *necessarily true* is in fact nothing more than a *generalization* which is derived from *habits*. Kant realizes that Hume’s conclusion undermines and challenges the possibility of every kind of firm and conclusive knowledge and of course of every kind of metaphysics.

¹⁰ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Lucretius), pp.78-9

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. L.W. Beck, New York, The Liberal Arts Press, 1950, p.8

In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant tries to find a solution to the skepticism of Hume. His main goal is to make an exposition of “the conditions and the limits” of the possibility of knowledge. He contends that all mathematical assertions are synthetic, yet we know them *a priori*. Again all laws of nature are synthetic but we know them *a priori*. This means that, mathematical propositions and laws of nature are *universal* and *necessary* because we know them *a priori* without having recourse to experience. By virtue of *space* and *time* as the forms of intuition and *concepts* as the *categories of understanding* the human mind organizes all that is given through sense perceptions and thus produces knowledge. In other words, space, time and the concepts of understanding are the conditions of any experience whatsoever. Kant says that, “[h]itherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects.”¹² If this is the case, he asks, how then could we know anything of objects *a priori*? Kant’s solution to the problem, known as the Copernican revolution in epistemology is, without doubt, accepted as a breakthrough in the history of philosophy: We must suppose that objects must conform to our faculty of understanding not the reverse. In other words, according to Kant, “we can know *a priori* of things only what we ourselves put into them.”¹³ However, Kant warns us that our knowledge of objects is limited only to the experience, in other words we can know the object as it appears to us but not the thing-in-itself. In this regard he refuses every kind of contentions which assert that the knowledge about (or the proof of) the existence of God is possible. He asserts that we cannot have knowledge about something, which is not perceived by the senses. Kant labels this kind of metaphysics as dogmatic. This distinction which Kant makes between the world of appearances and the thing-in-itself (i.e., distinction between phenomenal and noumenal realms), is not without purpose. His limiting knowledge only to the phenomenal realm will provide him with the opportunity to base his moral philosophy on the noumenal realm: In this regard,

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. K. Smith, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p.22

¹³ *Ibid*, p.23

his famous phrase, “I have ... found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith”¹⁴ is revealing.

2.3. Priority of “Practical Reason”

It would not be wrong to say that for both Epicurus and Kant practical philosophy, i.e., ethics, has prominence over theoretical philosophy even though Kant’s achievement in the theory of knowledge is deemed to be one of the most important breakthroughs in the history of philosophy. Epicurus also views his philosophy of nature as a means towards his ethical theory. It can be said that Epicurus depicts a physical world in accordance with his ethical theory. “Epicureanism begins with an ethical goal, and builds a natural philosophy in order to attain that goal.”¹⁵ As we are going to see in the coming chapters, for Epicurus this ethical goal is to live a tranquil life (i.e., *ataraxia*), a state which is free from all kind of bodily and mental disturbances. And Epicurus thinks that the main duty which natural philosophy has to accomplish is the banishment of the anxieties which are the primary obstacles to a tranquil life. He says that, “it is impossible for anyone to dispel his fear over the most important matters,” if he does not know the true nature of the universe, “but instead suspects something that happens in myth. Therefore, it is impossible to obtain unmitigated pleasure without natural science.”¹⁶ As has been stated above, for Epicurus the important thing is to secure a good life, and every sort of knowledge can only be a means towards this purpose. “Epicurean cosmology is devoted to the elimination of groundless fears, notably of death and of divine.”¹⁷ For such fears are the main impediments to peace of mind, i.e., *ataraxia*. As an atomist, Epicurus tries to give a thoroughly physical

¹⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.29

¹⁵ James Warren, *Epicurus and Democritean Ethics, An Archaeology of Ataraxia*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.199

¹⁶ *The Essential Epicurus*, (Epicurus, *Principal doctrines*, n.12), p.71

¹⁷ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (a comment by Long and Sedley), p.63

explanation of every sort of phenomena. In his *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus says that,

The chief disturbance in the minds of humankind arises when they think that these heavenly bodies are blessed and immortal but have at the same time wills, actions, and motives that are opposed to these divine attributes; and when they are constantly expecting and fearing some everlasting pain, as happens in myths. Or they fear the loss of sensation itself that comes with death, as if it were something that affected them directly.¹⁸

Epicurean philosophy rejects the idea of the incorporeality of the soul, which is not at all surprising. According to Epicurus, “it is impossible to think of incorporeal *per se* except as void. And void can neither act nor be acted upon, but merely provides bodies with motion through itself.”¹⁹ Therefore, he finds it nonsense to say that the soul is incorporeal. “For if it were like that it would be unable to act or be acted upon in any way whereas as a matter of fact both these accidental properties are self-evidently discriminable in the soul.”²⁰ In other words, according to Epicurus, as body and soul interact with each other, the soul should also be a corporeal thing like the whole aggregate of body. He contends that, the soul is a wind and heat-like fine structured body, diffused through the whole aggregate of the body. When the whole aggregate disintegrates the soul also scatters and can no longer perform its functions. Therefore, the immortality of the soul and belief in an afterlife are mere delusions. That is why Epicurus finds it groundless to be in fear of death or to be in the expectation of punishment or reward in afterlife. So according to Epicurus true knowledge of physical world and of human body and soul (and of course of gods) will help human beings in arranging a good conduct of life.

¹⁸ *The Essential Epicurus*, pp.40-1

¹⁹ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*), p.66

²⁰ *Ibid*, (Epicurus, *Letter to Herodotus*), p.66

As for Kant, his main purpose is to found a metaphysics which has the rigor of a science. As he thinks that every proposition of metaphysics (like mathematical propositions) is synthetic, he tries to find out how these propositions can also be *a priori*, i.e., how they can, universally and necessarily, be valid independent of any kind of experience. If we put it differently, Kant tries to show the legitimacy of *universal and necessary* moral principles. What he does, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* is to show the *conditions and the limits of the possibility of the knowledge* by giving an account of the mathematical propositions and the laws of nature, which are *synthetic and a priori*. As the name of Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (which is a summary of his *Critique of Pure Reason*) suggests, Kant's main task in these two works is to persuade his readers that we can know universal and necessary moral propositions in the same way as we know mathematical propositions, which are universal and necessary. In this way, Kant thinks that, (if we say it by his own terms), the transcendental ideality of knowledge and of morality is secured.

Again, Kant thinks that any kind of law of nature, at least in its form, is a model for the moral law. As there is an order, a regularity beneath the diversity in the physical world there should also be a similar regularity, a reason behind the diversity of all human deeds. According to Kant, all motives of the human deeds can be subsumed under certain principles in the same way that all the phenomenal diversity in the physical world is subsumed under certain laws of nature.

As it will be fruitful in the discussion of ethical theories of Epicurus and Kant, now I am going to turn very briefly to their theories of knowledge.

2.4. Epicurean Epistemology

We learn from Diogenes Laertius that Epicurus' philosophy "is divided into three parts- Canonic, Physics and Ethics. Canonic forms the introduction to the system

... The physical part includes the entire theory of Nature. ...The ethical part deals with the facts of choice and aversion.”²¹

In his *Canon* Epicurus gives an account of the criteria for truth and claims that *sensations, preconceptions* and *feelings* are the standards (criteria) for truth. As have been stated above, sense perception (sensation) is the first and most reliable criterion for truth. In his “*Against the Professors*” Sextus Empiricus (while summarizing Epicurus) illustrates the matter as follows:

I would not say that the vision is deceived just because from a great distance it sees the tower as small and round but from near to as larger and square. Rather I would say that it is telling the truth. Because when the sense object appears to it small and of that shape, it really is small and of that shape, the edges of the images getting eroded as a result of their travel through the air. And when it appears big and of another shape instead, it likewise is big and another shape instead. But the two are already different from each other: for it is left for distorted opinion to suppose that the object of impression seen from near and the one seen from far off are one and the same. The peculiar function of sensation is to apprehend only that which is present to it and moves it, such as colour, not to make the distinction that the object here is different one from the object there. Hence for this reason all impressions are true. Opinions, on the other hand, are not all true but admit some difference. Some of them are true some false.²²

In fact, it can be argued that the word ‘real’ would be much more suitable what Epicurus means by the word ‘truth’. In this regard, if we follow Epicurus’ way of argumentation, all that which perceived by senses are real but we may have either true or false assertions about this reality; so truth and falsity are not related with the reality (physical world) but with our judgments about this reality.

Diogenes Laertius says that, “[b]y *preconception* they [the Epicureans] mean a sort of apprehension or a right opinion or notion, or universal idea stored in mind; that

²¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans.. Hicks, R.D., Cambridge, Harvard University Pres, 1979, p.559

²² *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, p.81

is a recollection of an external object often presented.”²³ For example, we know that such and such a thing is the sun and as soon as we hear the word ‘*sun*’, mind immediately grasps what it signifies by virtue of the *preconception* of the *sun*. While, according to Epicurus, the origin of these preconceptions is in the empirical sensations they are nevertheless criteria of truth. He says that we need these preconceptions if we are going to make an inquiry. In his *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus says that, “we must grasp the things which underlie words, so that we may have them as reference point against which to judge matters of opinion, inquiry and puzzlement”²⁴

As for feelings, they constitute, according to Epicurus, the third criterion of truth. He points out that, feelings are standards according to which *choice* and *avoidance* are determined and that there are two “states of feelings”, namely, *pleasure* and *pain*. *Pleasure* is the favorable feeling for every living being and *pain* is the hostile feeling. In other words, every animate being by nature, seeks for *pleasure* and avoids the *pain*.

We have said above that some opinions are true and some false. In Epicurus’ point of view “[t]rue are those attested and those uncontested by self-evidence; false are those contested and those unattested by self-evidence. Attestation is perception through a self-evident impression of the fact that the object of opinion is such as it was believed to be.”²⁵ If, for instance, I assert that city A is more populated than city B, then my assertion would be checked by virtue of a census. If the figures of the census show that city A were less populated than city B, then my assertion (or opinion) would not be attested but rather contested, in other words my opinion is false. This is obviously an empiricist account of truth and falsity.

²³ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, p.561

²⁴ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, p.87

²⁵ *Ibid*, (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the professors*), p.91

According to Epicurus, it is legitimate to infer something non-evident from what is self-evident. He thinks that sometimes it is possible that there can be more than one explanation, which are not contested with that which is self-evident. In that case, he asserts that, all explanations can possibly be true; and it would be wrong to accept only one of these explanations as true and the others false. In *his Letter to Pythocles*, Epicurus says that;

Now in respect of all things which have a multiplicity of explanations consistent with things evident complete freedom from trepidation results when someone in the proper way lets stand whatever is plausibly suggested about them. But when someone allows one explanation while rejecting another equally consistent with what is evident, he is clearly abandoning natural philosophy altogether and descending into myth.²⁶

In other words, in Epicurus' view, a plausible theory of assertion cannot be dismissed as long as it is not contested, i.e., falsified. The inference of the non-evident from the evident is crucial in Epicurean philosophy because the foundation stones on which Epicurus has founded his conception of the physical world, namely, atoms and void are non-evident. He frequently recurses to analogies between what he calls the self-evident and the non-evident as a scientific method of inquiry.

It is true that all knowledge ultimately depends on senses, but we do not *see* such 'inaccessible realities' as atoms and voids. We calculate their existence on the basis of knowledge already assimilated, for example about the fact of motion. We then grasp that motion requires a void. The process of reasoning here is in most general terms called 'calculation'; its result is the formation of an after-thought. Epicurus hopes where possible to base his reasoning on clearly observed data, but with atoms and void this is impossible. In such cases the senses and the mid-sense provide us with indication from which we have to make inferences, while referring these inferences back to the evidence of the senses wherever we can.²⁷

It can be said that Epicurus' theory of knowledge is an edifice, built on sense perceptions: Every assertion, in the final analysis, has its roots in experience and

²⁶*The Hellenistic Philosophers*, p.92

²⁷ John M. Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction*, Cambridge, University Press, 1972, pp.89-90

again for verification of any assertion Epicurus refers again to experience (attestation and contestation). On the other hand for Kant the universal and the necessary aspect of knowledge has its roots in the human mind and in this way all sense perceptions are organized and systematized by the human mind. This difference between Epicurus' and Kant's respective theories of knowledge will help us to understand the difference between their respective ethics.

2.5. Kant's Epistemology in the Service of Practical Reason

As it has been stated above Kant tries to find a solution to the skepticism of David Hume. Hume's conclusion can be summarized as follows: All knowledge that is produced by the human mind is possible only through senses; and via induction, universal and necessary knowledge cannot be produced. According to Hume, the generalizations derived from habits are illegitimately taken as universal and necessary principles.

Kant agrees with Hume that experience (sensation, habit, induction) can never produce universal and necessary propositions or principles. However, Kant begins with mathematical propositions and laws of nature to show that it is possible for human mind to produce universal and necessary knowledge. Kant thinks that Hume has failed to realize that mathematical propositions are synthetic.

Kant argues that like mathematical propositions and laws of nature, metaphysical judgments or principles are also synthetic; therefore it must also be demonstrated if there could be any a priori (universal and necessary) metaphysical principles. The human mind organizes all data, which is perceived by the senses. It is in virtue of the concepts of understanding that the human mind can produce universal and necessary knowledge and, as is stated above, the proof of this is in mathematical propositions (and of course laws of nature). Having shown that there are synthetic a priori propositions of mathematics or laws of nature, Kant arrives at the conclusion that it is legitimate for human beings to make a priori synthetic

assertions. In other words, contrary to Hume, Kant argues that human being does not produce knowledge by habits or generalization (induction); the *universal* and *necessary* aspect of the knowledge is a necessary outcome of the human mind.

As will be seen later, this provides Kant with the arguments to establish a moral philosophy based on a universal and necessary (i.e., *a priori*) moral law. In other words, according to Kant, a true metaphysics can only be founded on a-priori principles of reason, which are synthetic principles. Kant paves the way by his *Critique of Pure Reason (first Critique)* in which he makes an exposition of his theory of knowledge, to his *Critique of Practical Reason (second Critique)* in which, together with his other treatises, he introduces his moral philosophy. In the *first Critique* he tries to give an answer to the question which he paraphrases as ‘what can I know?’ by a disposition of a priori conditions of knowledge, and in the *second Critique* an answer to the question ‘what ought I to do?’ by an exposition of a priori conditions or principles of morality.

2.6. The Problem of Free Will

Both Epicurus and Kant realize the centrality of the concept of ‘*freedom*’ or ‘*free will*’ for a system of morality and try to give an account, on the one hand, of *necessity*, on the other hand, of *free volition* in the causal chain. As we have stated above, as an atomist philosopher Epicurus contends that there is nothing but atoms and void in the universe. He claims that soul is also composed of atoms. In other words, he does not accept a body-soul dualism in the way Plato and many other philosophers did. Normally, as an atomist philosopher, it is expected that Epicurus would explain all ethical issues in a deterministic manner, but as we are now going to see, this is not the case. In his *Letter to Menoecus*, Epicurus explains necessity and free will as follows:

[S]ome things happen by necessity others as the result of the chance; other things are subject to our control. *Because necessity is not accountable to anyone*, he sees that chance is unstable but, *what lies in our control is*

subject to no master; it naturally follows, then, that *blame or praise attend our decisions*.²⁸

In other words, Epicurus thinks that there is something in our control, and for this reason, we are responsible for the results of our decisions. Indeed, we learn from the following quotation that he vehemently rejects the deterministic explanation: “It would be better to accept the myths about the gods than to be a slave to the “destiny” of the physical philosophers. The myths present the hope of appeasing the gods through worship, while the other is full of unappeasable necessity.”²⁹ But of course this does not mean that Epicurus is expecting something from gods. He believes that man is a self-sufficient being, which can and should attain happiness (a tranquil life) in his lifetime in this world. In fact, for him there is no afterlife. But as an atomist how does Epicurus account for free volition? He does this by virtue of the unpredicted motion of atoms. “Epicurus ... modified the deterministic Democritean system by introducing a slight element of indeterminacy to atomic motion, the *swerve*.”³⁰ So according to Epicurus human beings are subjected to necessity as they are composed of atoms but yet (as these atoms has an unpredicted or indeterminate motion, i.e., swerve,) they are free beings. As we learn from Cicero, “Epicurus’ reason for introducing this theory was his fear that, if the atom’s motion was always the result of natural and necessary weight, we would have no freedom, since the mind would be moved in whatever way it was compelled by the motion of atoms.”³¹ In the following quotation from Cicero’s *On Fate*, Carneades asserts that Epicureans could explain the concept of *free will* even without recourse to swerve:

Carneades showed that the Epicureans could defend their case without this fictitious swerve. For since they thought that a certain voluntary motion of the mind was possible, a defense of that doctrine was preferable to introducing the

²⁸*The Essential Epicurus, (Letter to Menoeceus), p.67 (Emphasis is added)*

²⁹*Ibid, (Letter to Menoeceus), p.67*

³⁰ *The Hellenistic Philosophers, (a comment by Long and Sedley), p.107*

³¹ *Ibid, (Cicero, On fate), p.105*

swerve, especially as they could not discover its cause. ... [B]y conceding there is no motion without a cause, they would not be conceding that all events were the result of antecedent causes. For our volition has no external antecedent causes. Hence when we say that someone wants or does not want something without a cause we are taking advantage of a common linguistic convention: by 'without a cause' we mean without an external antecedent cause, not without some kind of cause. ... [F]or voluntary motions of the mind there is no need to seek an external cause. For a voluntary motion itself has it as its own intrinsic nature that it should be in our power to obey us. And this fact is not without a cause; for the cause is that thing's own nature.³²

Here it is noteworthy that what Carneades advises to Epicureans is very much akin to what Kant later will say on free will. As is known, Kant, too, says that as a free agent man can start an action without any outer antecedent cause. Epicurus thinks that if the determinism is accepted, in other words, if people necessarily act as they do act then they cannot be regarded as responsible for their actions at all, and consequently there would be no ground for any morality. "Thus posing the problem of determinism he [Epicurus] becomes arguably the first philosopher to recognize the philosophical centrality of what we know as the Free Will Question."³³

As for Kant, in the preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason* he says that, "the concept of freedom in so far as its reality is proved by an apodictic law of practical reason, constitutes the keystone of the whole structure of pure reason, even of speculative reason"³⁴ and he adds that all other concepts of reason such as the Idea of God and the Idea of the immortality of the soul which are without support, "now attach themselves to this concept and with it and by means of it gets stability

³² *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Cicero, *On Fate*), p.105

³³ *Ibid*, (a comment by Long and Sedley), p.107

³⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, trans. and ed. M.J.Gregor, Cambridge, Cambridge Uni. Press, 1999, p.139

and objective reality, that is, their *possibility* is *proved* by this; that freedom is real, for this idea reveals itself through moral law.”³⁵

Kant claims that, “[m]etaphysics has to do not only with concepts of nature, which always find their application in experience, but also with pure rational concepts, which never can be given in any possible experience whatever.”³⁶ He maintains that objective reality of the concepts and truth or falsity of the assertions which metaphysics deals with cannot be discovered or confirmed by any experience.³⁷ Kant clarifies his project with the following words: “This part of metaphysics, however, is precisely what constitutes its essential end, to which the rest is only a means, and thus this science is in need of such a deduction for its own sake.”³⁸ Kant explains the difference between the concepts of the understanding and the concepts of reason as follows:

Every single experience is only a part of the whole sphere of its domain, but the absolute totality of all experience is itself not experience. Yet it is a necessary problem for reason, the mere representation of which requires concepts quite different from the pure concepts of the understanding, whose use is only immanent, or refers to experience, so far as it can be given. Whereas the concepts of reason aim at the completeness, that is, the collective unity of all possible experience, and thereby transcend every given experience.³⁹

Kant calls the concepts of reason Ideas. By Ideas, he means “the necessary concepts whose object cannot be given in any experience.”⁴⁰ He finds the distinction between the concepts of understanding and the Ideas of reason very

³⁵ *Critique of Practical Reason*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*), p.139

³⁶ *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p.75

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.75

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.75

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.76

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.76

crucial and adds that, “without this distinction metaphysics is absolutely impossible or is at best a random, bungling attempt to build a castle in the air without a knowledge of the materials.”⁴¹ According to Kant traditional metaphysics, which he labels as dogmatism, confuses the Ideas of reason with the concepts of understanding and thus draws illegitimate conclusions (e.g., traditional metaphysicians think that it is possible to prove the existence of God by mere beginning with the idea of God).

Kant contends that there are psychological, cosmological and theological Ideas of reason. But here, I will deal only with the cosmological Ideas (Ideas of freedom, of God and of the immortality of the soul) in accordance with the scope of this study.

Kant describes the importance of cosmological Ideas of reason as follows:

This product of pure reason, [the cosmological Ideas] in its transcendent use is its most remarkable phenomenon. It serves as a very powerful agent to rouse philosophy from its dogmatic slumber and to stimulate it to the arduous task of undertaking a critical examination of reason itself.⁴²

According to Kant, the cosmological Idea seeks for the connection between the conditioned with its condition. But experience cannot provide any knowledge about this connection. As it has been stated before, in Kant’s view, the object of an Idea “never can be adequately given in any experience.”⁴³ Kant says that, in accordance with the cosmological Ideas, there are only four kinds of dialectical assertions of pure reason to each of which “a contradictory assertion stands opposed.”⁴⁴ He calls these opposed assertions the *antinomies of reason*. According to him, these oppositions cannot be prevented. The third antinomy, which is related with the Idea of freedom, is as follows:

⁴¹ *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p.77

⁴² *Ibid*, p.86

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.86

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.87

Thesis: There are in the world causes through freedom.

Antithesis: There is no freedom, but all is nature.⁴⁵

Kant calls the first two antinomies mathematical and asserts that in these two antinomies both the thesis and the antithesis are false. As for the last two antinomies, i.e. the third and fourth ones, which he calls dynamical, Kant thinks that, the propositions (i.e., thesis and antithesis) are opposed to one another by mere misunderstanding and that *they may both be true*. This means that the above written propositions (which comprise third antinomy) may both be true. What Kant wants to do is to resolve “the antinomies by appeal to his distinction between noumena and phenomena. The antinomies show how important this distinction is, for without it, reason must be seen as giving rise to contradiction and skepticism will be justified.”⁴⁶ According to Kant, for any metaphysics to be founded properly, the compatibility of freedom with the necessity of the natural law (for finite rational beings) has to be shown. Kant stresses the importance of the distinction between phenomenal and noumenal worlds as follows:

If the objects of the world of sense are taken for things in themselves and ... laws of nature for laws of things in themselves, the contradiction would be unavoidable. So also, if the subject of freedom were, like other objects, represented as mere appearance, the contradiction would be just as unavoidable; for the same predicate would at once be affirmed and denied of the same kind of object in the same sense. But if natural necessity is referred merely to appearances and freedom merely to things in themselves, no contradiction arises if we at the same time assume to admit both kinds of causality, however difficult or impossible it may be to make the latter kind conceivable.⁴⁷

In the world of appearances, according to Kant, every event happens according to natural laws. But, he says that *freedom* is a property of certain *causes* of appearances; a property which can start them (appearances) spontaneously. This

⁴⁵ *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p.87

⁴⁶ Cristine M. Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of the Ends*, New York, Cambridge Uni. Press, 1996, p.11

⁴⁷ *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p.91

means that the causal act of the cause does not need any other ground to determine its start. Hence, the causal act cannot be regarded as under time-determination, but “would have to be considered as a thing-in-itself, while only its effects would be appearances.”⁴⁸ If we put it differently, in the sensuous world, natural necessity determines all connections of cause and effect but on the other hand freedom can be granted to the cause which is itself not an appearance, but the foundation of the appearance. He thus concludes that, “[n]ature and freedom therefore can without contradiction be attributed to the very same thing, but in different relations- on one side as an appearance, on the other as a thing in itself.”⁴⁹

Kant says that we have in us a faculty, which on the one hand stands in connection with the subjective determining grounds (motives) and on the other hand stands in connection with “objective grounds which are only Ideas so far as they can determine this faculty.”

This connection is expressed by the word *ought*. This faculty is called “reason” and so far as we consider a being (man) entirely according to this objectively determinable reason, he cannot be considered as a being of sense; this property is a property of a thing in itself.⁵⁰

Causality of reason is freedom and the effects of this freedom would be seen as appearances in the sensible world so far as we can consider objective grounds, which are themselves Ideas as their determinants. Kant’s contention is that if Ideas of reason, such as freedom, are the objective grounds of any action then, it cannot not be said that the action depends upon subjective conditions, not upon the laws of nature. “[B]ecause grounds of reason give the rule universally to actions, according to principles, without influence of the circumstances of either time or place.”⁵¹ In his view, inclinations (desires, pleasure and pain) cannot provide any

⁴⁸ *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, p.92

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.92

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, pp.92-3

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.93

objective ground for any action; they can only be subjective. Thus Kant contends that it is by virtue of freedom (which is an Idea of reason) that we may legitimately count on a universal and necessary moral law.

Now I may say without contradiction that all actions of rational beings, so far as they are appearances ... are subject to the necessity of nature, but the very same actions as regards merely the rational subject and its faculty of acting according to mere reason, are free.

...

Thus practical freedom, namely, the freedom in which reason possesses causality according to objectively determining grounds, is rescued, and yet natural necessity is not in the least curtailed. ... Thus we are able, in rational beings, ... to think of a faculty of beginning from themselves a series of states without falling into contradiction with the laws of nature.⁵²

With this account, Kant thinks that he can successfully show that freedom and natural necessity can be reconciled in a rational being. As we have seen, the Idea of freedom is the key stone of Kant's metaphysics. But how can we be sure that the Idea of freedom is not mere a delusion of reason? Kant asserts that, "among all ideas of speculative reason freedom is also the only one the possibility of which we know a priori, though without having insight to it, because it is the condition of the moral law which we know."⁵³ According to him, the Idea of God cannot be the condition of morality. Now, following Kant's argumentation it can be said that, there is a moral law and we are already aware of this moral law and freedom is the condition of this moral law, but we get the idea of freedom by virtue of the moral law. In fact, he himself realizes that this explanation is not immune to possible objections. The following quotation is a footnote, which he has added to the *Preface* to his *Critique of Practical Reason*:

⁵² *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, pp.93-4

⁵³ *Critique of Practical Reason*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Kant*) pp.139-140

Lest anyone suppose that he finds an inconsistency when I now call freedom the condition of the moral law and afterwards, in the treatise, maintain that the moral law is the condition under which we can first *become aware* of freedom, I want only to remark that whereas freedom is indeed the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. For had not the moral law already been distinctly thought in our reason, we should never consider ourselves justified in *assuming* such a thing as freedom. But were there no freedom, the moral law would not be encountered at all in ourselves.⁵⁴

This explanation shows that moral law, according to Kant, is “*the ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. In other words, the moral law furnishes cognition for the Idea of freedom, i.e., according to Kant, it is obvious that human beings have the knowledge of moral law. As the human being has the idea of the moral law, he/she has to inquire as to the source of this law. Is man the author of this law or is this law given to him/her by an outer source, e.g., by society, God etc.? Kant argues that, “[r]eason must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences; consequently, as practical reason ... it must be regarded of itself as free, that is, the will of such a being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom.”⁵⁵ In Kant’s point of view, as we have a distinct idea of moral law we are justified in assuming freedom. He maintains that we can never acquire the knowledge of the Ideas of reason, among which there is also the Idea of freedom, but there *is possibility* of freedom of rational beings, such as human beings, and reason must *regard itself as free*. If we put it differently, according to Kant, we can never demonstrate the proof of freedom, but nor the contrary, (i.e., that there is no freedom). If no one can demonstrate that there is no freedom, then, in Kant’s view, there is the possibility of freedom. And his argumentation continues as follows: As there is the possibility of freedom, man ought to stick to this possibility and accept himself as a free rational being.

⁵⁴ *Critique of Practical Reason*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Kant*), p.140

⁵⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University press, 1999, p.96

CHAPTER III

3. AN EXPOSITION OF EPICURUS' and KANT'S ETHICAL THEORIES

Before a comparison of the ethical systems of Epicurus and Kant, which will be performed in the next chapter, it would be convenient first to give portrayals of their moral philosophies. In this regard, we are going to explore first how Epicurus justifies the need for an objective morality. As I have said before I will, in a sense, reconstruct Epicurus' ethical system by gathering his scattered sayings under a systematic whole. Then, I will examine Kant's ethical system by giving a special emphasis on his endeavor for deducing of a transcendently ideal moral law of reason as this deduction of moral law will be a base for his all ethical system, and a supporting point for his depicting Epicurean ethical system as being a system of selfishness instead of being a system of an objective morality.

3.1. Epicurus' Ethical System

As is well known Epicurus is believed by many to be an advocate of hedonism, (hedonism in the ordinary sense of the word) as if he advises indulgence to every sort of pleasure. For instance, in an English dictionary for the meaning of the word 'epicure' the following explanation is given: "An epicure is a person who enjoys eating food which is of very good quality."⁵⁶ Epicurean philosophy has been fiercely attacked by the rival philosophical schools, political powers and even by the Christian Church. And as a result of such attacks there has been, on the scene, a quite distorted picture of this philosophy. The following quotation from D.S. Hutchinson is illuminating about long-lasting prejudice against Epicurean philosophy:

Epicurus developed a system of philosophy and a way of living that deserve our respect and understanding, perhaps even our allegiance. ... But from the very beginning of his teaching mission, his message was

⁵⁶ *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, England, Harpers Collins Publisher, 1994,

opposed and distorted... Even in modern times, the critics of Epicureanism continue to misrepresent it as a lazy-minded, shallow, pleasure-loving, immoral, or godless travesty of real philosophy. Please have the courage to ignore two thousand years of negative prejudice, and assess this philosophy on its own considerable merits.⁵⁷

Though the above mentioned distorted picture of Epicureanism is partly a result of some of Epicurus' own words, it would not be wrong to say that this kind of criticism of Epicurean philosophy is superfluous. The following quotation is attributed to Epicurus by Cicero, which can be deemed as an example causing the above-mentioned misinterpretations.

For my part I cannot conceive of anything as the good if I remove the pleasures perceived by means of taste and sex and listening to music, and the pleasant motions felt by the eyes through beautiful sights, or any other pleasures which sensation generates in man as a whole. Certainly, it is impossible to say that mental delight is the only good. For a delighted mind, as I understand it, consist in the expectation of all things I just mentioned-to be of a nature able to acquire them without pain.⁵⁸

Again, Epicurus says that, “[t]he beginning and root of every good is the pleasure of the stomach. Even wisdom and refinements are referable to this.”⁵⁹ By such aphorisms, which at first glance seem a bit striking, Epicurus indeed wants to point out the principality of pleasure in general; and it would be unjust to draw from merely such kind of words the conclusion that Epicurus recommends a hedonistic way of life of any sort. Because there are also plenty of contrary evidences that, he vehemently criticizes every kind of excessive pleasure. Epicurus indeed depicts a very modest way of being happy: “The flesh’s cry is not to be hungry or thirsty or cold. For one who is in these states and expects to remain so could rival even Zeus in happiness.”⁶⁰ For Epicurus the important thing is that a living being should not

⁵⁷ See, Introduction by D.S. Hutchinson, in Brad Inwood, L.P. Gerson (eds.) *The Epicurus Reader : Selected Writings and Testimonia*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1994.

⁵⁸ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Cicero, *Tusculan disputations*), p.117

⁵⁹ *The Essential Epicurus*, (Fragments, No: 58), p.98

⁶⁰ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings*), p.116

be in want of any of its *necessary* desires. In other words, the nature of any living being is so constituted that it should fulfill its necessary desires. If a living being is in want of something (which means that the situation is contrary to its nature) then it feels pain and in this regard, every kind of pleasure, (bodily or mental) which relieves pain has the same value or importance for that living being. As we will see, Epicurus contends that there are natural and vain desires, and of the natural desires, some are necessary, others unnecessary. According to Epicurus, all pleasures, which result from the satisfaction of natural and necessary desires, are the same no matter what kind of pleasures they are. In this regard, there is no difference between mental and bodily pleasures.

3.1.1. Pleasure as the Criterion of Good

In fact, *pleasure* has a technical meaning and pivotal importance in Epicurean philosophy. According to Epicurus the main task or purpose of philosophy is to give a true account of human nature, and thus to help man to secure a good life. In Epicurus' view, pleasure is a primordial characteristic of human nature, in the light of which all human deeds could properly be understood. At least what Epicurus does not mean by pleasure is clear enough. These are his own words:

When we say that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of dissipated and that those consist in having a good time. ... For what produces the pleasant life is not continuous drinking and parties or pederasty or womanizing or the enjoyment of fish and other dishes of an expensive table.⁶¹

Then what kind of pleasure does Epicurus mean that man should pursue? The Epicurean spokesman Tarquatus gives the following response: "The pleasure we pursue is not just that which moves our actual nature with some gratification and is perceived by the senses in company with a certain delight. *We hold that to be*

⁶¹ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*), p.114

*greatest pleasure which is perceived once all pain has been removed.*⁶² He says that when we manage to remove all pain “we rejoice in the actual freedom.” In other words, for Epicurus pleasure mainly signifies the absence of pain. Then the question arises: How can all pain be removed from life? Or would it ever be possible for man to achieve a state which is free from all mental and bodily disturbances? Epicurus responds to this latter question positively and says that the main purpose of philosophy must be the achievement of this goal, which, as we will see, according to him is the ultimate purpose of every man. He distinguishes between different types of desires and claims that some of our desires are natural and others are vain. Of natural desires some are necessary others are unnecessary. Epicurus says that a firm knowledge about our nature, our desires will help us to live a good life:

And of the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, others for the body’s freedom from stress. For, the steady observation of these makes it possible to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the soul’s freedom from disturbance, since this is the end belonging to the blessed life.⁶³

Far from being an adviser of excessive pleasures, Epicurus propounds rather a simple and modest life. He says that, “plain dishes offer the same pleasure as a luxurious table, when the pain that comes from want is taken away,”⁶⁴ and adds that “[n]othing is sufficient for the man to whom the sufficient is too little.”⁶⁵ Of course, in his point of view, ‘*sufficient*’ that eases man’s pain is not too much. According to him, the human being (like all living beings) naturally has a tendency to live in a state which is free from any kind of pain. If someone is in need of any want then he/she is obviously in pain, and it is important and necessary that this want should be remedied. This is in fact nothing more than an inclination toward

⁶² *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Cicero, *On ends*), p.113 (Emphasis is added)

⁶³ *Ibid*, (Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecus*), p.113

⁶⁴ *The Essential Epicurus*, (*Letter to Menoecus*), p.66

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, (*Vatican sayings*, no:68), p.84

the self-preservation of a living being. A living being should live in accordance with its *nature*; and to be in *pain* (which means that the living being is in need of *pleasure*) would be contrary to this *nature*. Hence, as any living being naturally (has an inclination and) endeavors for self-preservation, its main purpose is to achieve a state which is free from all kind of disturbances (in the case of human beings all kinds of bodily and mental disturbances). Epicurus contends that this tranquil state, i.e., *ataraxia*, is the ultimate goal (i.e., the highest good) of the human being.

I have said that it has been a commonplace to caricaturize Epicurean ethics. In fact, behind the popular or superfluous side of the debate, at a deeper level, there was a serious debate taking place between the Epicureans and the Stoics over the issues “whether the ultimate good of life is pleasure, i.e., happiness, or virtue” and “whether the criteria in defining *good* and *evil* has its base in *feelings* (sensation) or in *reason*.” As mentioned above, for Epicurus the ultimate good is to live in *ataraxia*, a state of tranquility, which is free from all kind of bodily and/or mental pain, and the *criteria* which govern all human behavior, are *feelings*. In other words, Epicurus thinks that, in the final analysis, it is the expected *pleasure* or *pain* which determines human actions. On the other hand, the Stoics assert that the ultimate good and the sole duty for life is *virtue* (or to be virtuous) and the sole criterion to decide whether something is good or evil, is *reason* not feelings. According to the Stoics, the attainment of virtue itself brings with it happiness.⁶⁶ Kant, who, as expected, lends countenance to the Stoics, gives a more objective interpretation of Epicurean philosophy:⁶⁷

The highest good of Epicurus was ... happiness, or, as he called it, pleasure, that is, an inner contentment and cheerful of heart. One must be secure against all reproaches from oneself or others- *but that is no philosophy of*

⁶⁶ See, Bedia Akarsu , *Mutluluk Ahlakı*, Istanbul, İnkılap Kitabevi, 1998, p.75

⁶⁷ Though Kant criticizes Epicurean moral philosophy as his main target, we see him appreciating Epicurus positively in his writings. Peter Fennes says that, Kant in his early years of pre-Critical Period, influenced by Epicurean philosophy. See, Peter Fennes, *Late Kant, Toward Another Law of the Earth*, Routlage, New York, London, 2003, pp.,8-31

pleasure, and he has thus been poorly understood. We have still a letter from him[Letter to Menoeceus] in which he invites someone to dine, but promises to receive him with nothing else but a cheerful heart and a dish of polenta, a sorry meal for an epicure. *Such pleasure was thus the pleasure of sage.*⁶⁸

As I have said above, the concept of *hedone*, i.e., *pleasure*, has a technical (foundational) meaning in Epicurus' philosophy. According to Epicurus, *pleasure*, from the birth on, is the essential driving motive of every living being. It is a *natural* and *inalienable* trait of human beings; it is the essential purpose, which determines every choice and avoidance of a human being. In his *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus emphasizes the importance of *pleasure* as follows:

[P]leasure is the beginning and the end of the blessed life. For we recognize pleasure as the good which is primary and congenital, from it we begin every choice and avoidance, and we come back to it, *using the feeling as yardstick for judging every good thing.*⁶⁹

Epicurus says that all living beings, by nature, have a tendency towards pleasure and abstain from pain. And according to him, this is a self-evident truth, which does not need any further verification. It can be said that, in his view, pleasure has an *intrinsic goodness*. Let us appeal to the testimony of Cicero:

As soon as each animal is born, it seeks pleasure and rejoices in it as the highest good, and rejects pain as the greatest bad thing, driving it away from itself as effectively as it can; and it does this while it is still not corrupted, while the judgment of nature herself is unperverted and sound. Therefore, he[Epicurus] says that there is no need of reason or debate about why pleasure is to be pursued and pain is to be avoided. He [Epicurus] thinks that these things are perceived, as we perceive that fire is hot, that snow is white, that honey is sweet. None of these things requires confirmation by sophisticated argumentation; it is enough just to have them pointed out. ... Moreover, *since* there is nothing left if you deprive

⁶⁸ Immanuel, Kant, *Lectures on Ethics, the Cambridge edition of the works of Immanuel Kant*, eds. P. Heath and J.B. Schneewind,(trans.),Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.46. (Emphasis is added)

⁶⁹ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, p.114 (Stress is added)

man of his sense-perception, it is necessary that nature herself judge what is natural and what is unnatural.⁷⁰

This quotation says much about Epicurus' conception of human being. First of all, as stated before, according to Epicurus, the *ultimate good* for man is *pleasure*, and the criteria for pleasure and pain (i.e., to decide *good* an *evil*) are obviously *feelings*. He says that, "there is no need of reason or debate about why pleasure is to be pursued", for this, in his view, is a self-evident truth. Epicurus thus appeals to common sense. As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, according to Epicurus, all sense perceptions are true and what is clear with sense perceptions needs no further proof. In this sense, he says that, intrinsic goodness of pleasure should be beyond any dispute. He also points out that any living being seeks pleasure "while it is still not corrupted." But what does it mean for human being to be corrupted or not corrupted? Does it mean that when a human being is corrupted he/she stops seeking pleasure and pursuing pain? Or does it mean that the human being alienates him/her-self and seeks pleasures which indeed are vain or unnecessary for him? I think Epicurus should have voiced this idea against the Stoics who welcome pain in the attainment of virtue and, in this regard, assert that there is no difference between pleasure and pain for the human being. Of course, Epicurus accepts that there may be cases that compel man to choose pain instead of pleasure but this, he says, would be because of an anticipation of an even greater pleasure.

As we have seen before, Epicurus differentiates between different kinds of pleasures, and says that there are natural and vain pleasures. And of natural ones some are necessary and others are unnecessary pleasures. In this regard, for instance, eating food is a natural and necessary desire, but eating a luxurious meal is natural but unnecessary desire, and wishing fame is a vain desire. He says that a firm understanding of the subject of pleasure (or of our desires) would enable us to secure a life in peace, a life free from pain. This firm understanding is nothing but

⁷⁰ *The Epicurus Reader*, p.59

prudence, which, Epicurus maintains, “is more valuable even than philosophy; and from it drive all the other virtues.”⁷¹ Thus, it can be said that, in Epicurus’ view, if anyone is pursuing pleasures (desires) which are neither natural nor necessary (i.e., vain and non-necessary pleasures), then he cannot be deemed as prudent and be accepted as acting against his *nature*, and thus he/she can be deemed as corrupted. But Epicurus would find corrupted those who reject natural and necessary desires as well. According to him, they are wrong in expecting that the achievement of virtue (happiness) is possible by rejecting every kind of desire (without seeing any difference between them). As is known, for some rationalist philosophers the soul is imprisoned in the body and body’s all desires must be refuted for a real freedom. They thus despise every kind of pleasures and find it immoral to be in pursuit of pleasure. But Epicurus finds this conception as contrary to human nature and says that, “[w]e must not resist nature but obey her. We shall obey her by fulfilling the necessary desires and the physical ones if they do not harm us, but harshly rejecting the harmful ones.”⁷² In fact, Epicurus does not reject any kind of pleasures categorically. He says no pleasure is bad *per se*; only those pleasures, the enjoyment of which do harm to others or to oneself, should be rejected. So long as pleasures do not cause any harm they can be enjoyed whatever kind of pleasure they may be.

3.1.2. Prudence: A Means for *Ataraxia*

Epicurus still has to respond to some other questions: If feelings are the sole criteria in choosing pleasure, how can man choose between different kinds of pleasures, if there is such a difference? Likewise, if man in an occasion refuses the present pleasure just because of its potential bad consequences, then is it not reason (instead of feelings), which decides whether the action is to be performed or not? In the above quotation, (see footnote no.70), Epicurus contends that if man were deprived of his sense perception there would be nothing left. Does this mean

⁷¹ *The Essential Epicurus, (Letter to Menoeceus)* p.67

⁷² *Ibid, (Vatican Sayings, no.21),* p.78

that apart from sense perceptions there is no such a self-subsisting, self-deciding entity, which we call *reason* or *soul*? Of course, Epicurus does not reject the existence of the soul or reason. But according to Epicurus, like everything else which comprises human being, *soul is also corporeal* (i.e., composed of atoms) and it also has sensation. In his *Letter to Heredotus*, Epicurus asserts that “the soul has the major responsibility for sensation.”⁷³ He says that both body and soul can interact with each other, (i.e., one has effect on the other) therefore, they must both be composed of the same kind of substance, namely, atoms. And when body disintegrates soul too will disintegrate. This means that the soul cannot survive body’s death. Certainly, there is no such a dualistic (body-soul) conception of the human being in Epicurean philosophy. In his view, there is no innate component of human knowledge, that is, all human knowledge is an edifice whose all components are products of human experience.

It would not be wrong then to say that for Epicurus, reason is nothing more than an organizer of past sensations. In this sense, it can be said that according to Epicurus, it is man’s past-experiences which help him in choosing correct pleasures. He many times emphasizes that by sober reasoning (i.e., *prudence*) man can choose the true pleasure; but this does not mean that he finds reason having an innate capacity in the sense that it has priority over feelings in choosing good and evil. In the previous chapter, we have seen that according to Epicurus, sense perceptions, feelings, and preconceptions are three kinds of criteria for deciding *truth* and *falsity*, and *good* and *evil*. What he called preconceptions (concept, notion, universal) are nothing but the outcome of past-experiences stored in the mind. We learn from Cicero that Epicurean spokesman Tarquotes says our mind has no innate preconception.⁷⁴ This is, of course, a consistent account of an empiricist (atomist) philosophy. In this view, if I am allowed to reiterate, reason (preconception) is nothing but a product of the sense perceptions. The principal ‘animality’ seeks for self-preservation, a life free from pain (i.e., a life in pleasure)

⁷³ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, p.65

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, (Cicero, *On ends*) p.112

and reason is (and should be) a tool for providing this good life (pleasure or happiness). It can be said that Epicurus accepts no difference between feelings and reason (and of course senses) in the service of life; they should be regarded as human being's capacities for securing a tranquil (good) life. As we shall see in the coming pages, on this matter Kant is diametrically opposed to Epicurus; he asserts that morality ought to exclude everything deriving from sense perception (i.e., all that which is empirical) and must be founded on principles of *pure reason* alone. According to Kant, prior to all experience, by virtue of *moral law of reason* man is able to decide what is *good* or *evil*. This means that human being (as a rational being) has an innate power to produce morality (good and evil) and this innate power (i.e., moral law) has nothing to do with anything empirical (as its driving motive). In Kant's view, the driving motive of moral law cannot be pleasure or happiness, and he goes on to argue that for an action to be deemed as moral, that action ought to be performed out of respect to moral law, i.e., from duty. On the other hand, in the following quotation from Cicero's *On Ends*, we see the Epicurean spokesman Torquatus rejecting the natural or innate power of reason in deciding *good* and *evil*:

What does it perceive or what does it judge except pleasure and pain as a basis for its pursuit or avoidance of anything? Some of our school, however, want to transmit these doctrines in a subtler way: *they deny the sufficiency of judging what is good or bad by sensation, saying that the intrinsic desirability of pleasure and the intrinsic undesirability of pain can be understood by the mind too and by reason*. So they say that our sense that the one is desirable and the other is undesirable is *virtually a natural and innate preconception in our minds* ... To enable you to view the origin of the entire mistake of those who criticize pleasure and praise pain, I will disclose the whole matter and expound the actual words of the famous discoverer of the truth, the architect, as it were, of the happy life[Epicurus]. No one rejects or dislikes or avoids pleasure itself because it is pleasure, but because great pains result for those who do not know how to pursue pleasure rationally. Nor again is there anyone who loves, goes after or wants to get pain itself because it is pain, but because circumstances sometimes occur which enable him to gain some great pleasure by toil and pain.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, p.112-3 (Emphasis is added)

Epicurus says no pleasure is *per se* bad; and if we do abstain from any pleasure, it is because of the bad consequences, which would follow from it. Therefore, in the pursuit of pleasure, man must act rationally, but of course, this rationality (i.e., prudence) is something derived from experience. As we have seen before, according to Epicurus every choice and avoidance of man is (should be) directed towards an end (i.e., happiness). In this regard, he says that “[t]he following method of inquiry must be applied to every desire: What will happen to me if what I long for is accomplished? What will happen if it is not accomplished?”⁷⁶ Thus in his view, the human being calculates (or should calculate) the consequences of his/her deeds, and in accordance with the outcome of this calculation he/she decides (should decide) whether to perform or abstain from any action. Then it would not be wrong to say that, according to Epicurus, a good action is that which produces the greatest benefit for the agent. Thus, in his view, every choice or avoidance, in a sense, has a utility value for man, that is, every action must be performed for the sake of a good life. Any action must be performed to produce a good in the end of the day. Strictly speaking, Epicurus is a consequentialist and surely not a deontologist. In this regard, in Epicurus’ view, every action or abstention is obviously *conditional* which means that if one wants to be happy he/she must act in a certain way. What is the import of this view for morality? Certainly, there arise some questions, which have to be clarified: Does this mean that Epicurus advocates a thoroughly selfish stance in human conduct? If man is to pursue his own happiness, how can this self-happiness be reconciled with the interests (happiness) of others? In other words, how can men’s different pleasures (benefits) be reconciled, if this reconciliation can ever be possible? Is it possible for man to be able to calculate the consequences of every action? Can past-experiences guarantee to have control over the future expectations? In this regard, is it possible for man to eliminate all kind of bodily and mental disturbances as Epicurus contends?

⁷⁶ *The Essential Epicurus, (Vatican sayings, no.71), p.84*

I have said above that Epicurus does not accept a body-soul dualism in the way Plato does. And Epicurus contends that, the soul does not survive body's death. Of course, this conception of human nature has important moral implications. First of all, as there is no afterlife, the fear of death would be groundless. Epicurus' famous aphorism says that, "most frightful of evils, death, is nothing to us, seeing that when we exist death is not present, and when death is present we do not exist."⁷⁷ According to Epicurus, fear of death and expectation of a punishment in afterlife are vain, and (in the case of ignorance) cause mental anguish. Therefore, in his view, the main purpose of the philosophy must be revealing of the true nature of universe, and of course, the true nature of human being as well. In this regard, as stated in the previous chapter, his theory of the physical world (indeed like his all philosophy) is in the service of his main ethical goal. Secondly, Epicurus says that when we know the limits of our life (and the limits of our desires as well) (i.e., that we are not immortal, or that the stomach is not insatiable) we could realize that "how easy it is to obtain that which removes pain caused by want" and that we have "no need for competitive involvements."⁷⁸ According to Epicurus, it is a vain idea of immortality (or the idea that the wants of our body are limitless) that causes man to pursue vain and/or unnecessary desires. Addressing his pupils Epicurus says that, "[y]our anxiety is in direct proportion to your forgetfulness of nature, for you bring on yourselves unlimited fears and desires."⁷⁹ In this way, in fact what Epicurus advises is a modest and simple life. He contends that philosophy (by virtue of which we get prudence) enables us to know our true nature, and our natural desires, which are indeed easy to satisfy. He claims that, "[t]he stomach is not insatiable, as many people say, but rather the false opinion that the stomach needs an endless amount to fill it."⁸⁰ Here stomach is obviously a symbol; what he means is that all necessary desires, (i.e., desires to fulfill necessary wants), of man

⁷⁷ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*), p.150

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, (Epicurus, *Key doctrines*, n.21) p.150

⁷⁹ *The Essential Epicurus*, (*Fragments*, n.46), p.96

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, (*Vatican sayings*, n.59), p.83

are limited and easy to procure. According to him “[t]he thankless greed of the soul makes the creature forever hungry for refinements in its mode of living.”⁸¹ It is likely that in an Epicurean world there would be no need for competitive involvement for any kind of want. But is it really so easy for human beings to procure all of their wants? It is a well-known view, shared by many economists, that human wants are limitless while the sources are scarce. In Epicurus’ view, if there is a competition between people for the procurement of their wants, this is, basically, because of their ignorance about the true nature of man. By learning to be satisfied with little, man would eliminate competition with *others* and thus can provide a life in peace. However, the inward control over desires (i.e., being satisfied with only that which is necessary for the body) is not the sole obligation that man should accomplish to secure a life in peace. It is obvious that *others*, in a sense, appear as checkpoints on the way to a tranquil life, to *ataraxia*. And men have to find ways which enable them to live with others in peace. Then, it can be concluded that *prudence*, in Epicurus’ view, is internally to know our true nature and so control our vain and unnecessary desires, and externally to establish a system of laws, which enables us to live a life without being harmed by others, and, of course, without harming others.

3.1.3. Virtue

Having eliminated the fear of death and the fear from gods, now, Epicurus has before him the task of eliminating the fear resulting from *others*. Although Epicurus advises people to “live unnoticed” and not to become involved in political affairs he nevertheless very well knows that man cannot isolate himself from the society and to provide security from others, laws or conventions are needed. For peace, justice is needed, but this peace certainly would not be only an external peace. Epicurus says that, “justice’s greatest reward is peace of mind.”⁸² The external peace is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for a tranquil

⁸¹ *The Essential Epicurus, (Vatican sayings, n.69), p.84*

⁸² *Ibid, (Fragments, n.80), p.100*

life; to reach peace of mind one has to do more. He/she ought to have a disposition towards justice. In other words, the problem is not that one should not do wrong but that he/she has, in all occasions, to be just. Epicurus says that, “[t]he laws are laid down for the sake of the wise, not to prevent from doing wrong but to keep them from being wronged.”⁸³ These explanations show that, in Epicurus’ view, justice is not something that one can disregard when it contradicts one’s self-interest. One should unconditionally be just. It is important to mention here that the system of laws (moral or juridical) which Epicurus offers, far from being selfish, is quite vigorous to bind everyone alike without any exception. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant depicts the Epicurean moral philosophy repeatedly as “self-love ethics”, or “an ethics seeking one’s own happiness” and the like. However we shall see that, this kind of portrayal of Epicurean philosophy is inadequate, and, in fact, what Epicurus advises, is not an egoistic morality, (i.e., a morality which seeks only one’s own happiness and disregards others’ interests), but rather a morality, which propounds happiness for all. We will see that in Epicurus’ conception of morality one’s own happiness is unavoidably bound up with the happiness of others. That is, according to him, it is impossible for one to secure happiness without taking into account the interests of others.

As I have stated before Epicurus depicts the *ultimate good* for man as to live a life, which is free from all kind of bodily and mental disturbances. He says that, “[w]hatever you can provide yourselves with the secure protection from men is a natural good.”⁸⁴ This definition of natural good deserves particular attention to understand Epicurus’ moral philosophy. Certainly, man has to acquire these natural goods in order to secure a good life. But how can one have something with the secure protection from others? There can be three possibilities: Either others are not aware of this possession, or the power of the possessor can eliminate the possibility of any assault against the possession, or else others give consent to this possession without directing any claims towards it. Discussing these three

⁸³*The Essential Epicurus, (Fragments, n.81), p.100*

⁸⁴*Ibid, (Principal doctrines, n.6), p.70*

possibilities separately would help us to understand the ground upon which Epicurus bases his moral philosophy.

It is interesting that Epicurus, nearly two thousand years before Kant, gave a formula, which resembles very much Kant's categorical imperative: He says that "[y]ou ought to do nothing in your life that will make you afraid if it becomes known to your neighbor."⁸⁵ What can be said about these words of Epicurus? Does Epicurus mean that one can do anything if he can manage to conceal it from others? Or does it mean that whatever one does he/she ought to take into account the consent of others? Of course, one can do something, which does not at all concern others. It is obvious that what Epicurus means here is one's deeds, the performances of which may transgress others' interests. The above fragment can be interpreted as follows: Even if there is nobody around, one should not infringe others' interests. Or if I put it differently, one should in every occasion obey the law which protects everyone's interests alike.

Let us now return back to the three possibilities that I have mentioned above. First of all, it would be convenient to begin with the question whether is it possible for someone to commit a crime and hide it forever from others? And another question: How should one behave if the non-detection of a crime is definite? Epicurus himself asks and answers the question: "Will the wise man do things forbidden by law, knowing that he will not be caught? The simple answer is not easy to find."⁸⁶ Can we infer from this answer that Epicurus finds it permissible to break the law in case of non-detection by others? As we are going to see in a moment, it will be unjust to draw such a conclusion. First of all, we have a fragment of him which says the opposite: "The man who has realized the highest purpose of the human race is equally as good, even when no one is around."⁸⁷ To accept that all

⁸⁵ *The Essential Epicurus, (Vatican sayings, n.70), p.84*

⁸⁶ *Ibid, (Fragments, n.2), p.87*

⁸⁷ *Ibid, (Fragments, n.83), pp.100-1*

individuals' purposes are equally good is obviously equal to the rejection of selfishness. This fragment enables us to infer that, according to Epicurus, one's self-happiness is in close connection with the happiness of others. Besides this rejection, which sounds like a categorical principle, Epicurus rejects the unhidden crimes in a more utilitarian way. The situation above depicted in fact resembles very much the story of Gyges, which Plato tells us in his *Republic*.⁸⁸ According to the story, Gyges has a magic ring, which enables him to be invisible. The problem is formulated as follows: Is there anything, which can prevent Gyges from committing whatever crimes he wishes? Glaucon (the interlocutor of Socrates in the dialog) contends that even wise men commit crimes in such a case. However, Socrates (Plato) says that justice is something which is good *per se* and is unconditional; therefore, the just man even in this condition ought not to break the law. Though Epicurus above says that the answer is not easy to find, he solves the problem this time in the way Alexander the Great cut the knot of Gordium. Epicurus finds it *impossible* that one commits a crime and be assured *that the crime would stay undetected*. In other words, in his view such a problem is fictitious and does not touch the real state of human beings. Epicurus says that,

It is impossible for the one who commits some act in secret violation of the compacts made among men not to do harm or to be harmed, to remain confident that he will escape notice, even if for the present he escapes detection a thousand times. *For right up to the day of his death, it remains unclear whether he will escape detection.*⁸⁹

Knowing that for Epicurus the main purpose of man is a tranquil life and assuming that an unhidden crime will definitely cause uneasiness of mind I argue that, for Epicurus any unhidden crime cannot be preferable. He depicts that which awaits those who commit unhidden crimes with the following words: "Even if they are able to escape detection, it is impossible for them to remain assured of escaping. Therefore, fear over the future always presses upon them and does not allow them

⁸⁸ See Plato, *Republic*, Book II, trans. R. Waterfield, Oxford, New York, Oxford Uni. Press, 1993

⁸⁹ *The Essential Epicurus, (Principal doctrines, n.35), p.74* (Emphasis is added)

to take pleasure or confidence in the present.”⁹⁰ Thus, it can be concluded that Epicurus leaves out the possibility of any crime to go forever undetected. According to him, no one can (and should) count on this possibility. In other words, Epicurus stays realistic and refuses any hidden crime on the possibility of detection, i.e., bad consequences resulting from any probable punishment. Though we cannot say that Epicurus does refuse *crime* categorically in an idealistic way as Plato did (and obviously as Kant will do), we can nevertheless say that he draws a rule (law) which is based on a calculation regarding the consequences of the actions. On the basis of this calculation he finds it indefensible to count on the non-detection of the crime. For Epicurus, rules (laws) are precepts, which are derived from human experience. But this does not mean that one would do this calculation in every unique situation and act in an opportunistic way in accordance with his/her interest. Epicurus’ reasoning is as follows: When it is taken generally, non-detection cannot be relied upon (as there is possibility of detection and consequently punishment), so one should leave it out for every possible situation. In this way, I argue that, in fact Epicurus, too, refuses crime categorically, but this time on the basis of human experience, i.e., in an empirical way. His rule is not an ideal principle, which is prior to any human experience but an outcome of the human experience. It is obvious that in Epicurus’ view, any law, or justice in general, has to serve to secure a good life, and in this regard, it is instrumental. However, on the other side, to secure peace man *has to* obey law and not to count on *non-detection*. One can possibly depict a situation in which *non-detection* can be assured. It is important, however, to mention that Epicurus accepts no exception for even a definite non-detection. As soon as a crime is committed, an inescapable anxiety of a probable detection would follow and this would obviously stand as a constant menace to peace of mind. In this way, Epicurus leaves out the possibility of non-detection. This is nothing but an account of legitimatizing the law (or justice in general) in an empirical way. He gives a picture of human conditions to persuade us that we are obliged to obey the law, which in turn will provide us with a tranquil life. It is needed to point out at this point that, *fear* is not the sole thing

⁹⁰ *The Essential Epicurus, (Fragments, n.82), p.100*

that compels man to justice; as we will see soon, *love* towards others (e.g., friendship) is another motive for justice. Now, if I put it in Kantian terms, Epicurus depicts what *is* and advises what *ought to be*. In his view, virtue is the condition of happiness and prudence is the dearest of all virtues.

[T]he wise man does not think that either good or evil is furnished by chance to humankind for the purpose of living a happy life, but that the opportunities for great good or evil are bestowed by it. He thinks that it is preferable to remain prudent and suffer ill fortune than to enjoy good luck while acting foolishly. It is better in human actions that the sound decision fail than the rash decision turn out well due to luck.⁹¹

So it can be said that, according to Epicurus even if in some unique situations one can benefit something in detriment of others without the possibility of non-detection he/she should not behave in this way. He/she should follow prudence and in all situations should stick to the conventions (laws). One should not count on chance or haphazard possibilities. What is important is not to enjoy momentary pleasures, but to be in a state of a general well-being, a state of peace. In this regard, the attainment of happiness is in the hands of man and not a matter of chance; true reasoning, i.e., prudence is the means that brings happiness.

Secondly, we should inquire whether, according to Epicurus, it is *power* that enables man to possess something with the secure protection from others. Epicurus says that “[t]hose who possess the power of securing themselves completely from their neighbors, live most happily with one another, since they have this constant assurance.”⁹² Of course, power can be manipulated in two ways: It can be used to defend what is lawful or it can be used to violate the law. In this second sense, the *powerful* may impose his *will* as a law to the *weak*. In the following quotation, Lucretius, a devoted Epicurean of the Roman time, claims that if everyone counts on his power (instead of covenants, i.e., laws) to secure something from others, this will inevitably lead to the total destruction of human race.

⁹¹ *The Essential Epicurus, (Letter to Menoecus)*, p.68

⁹² *Ibid, (Principal doctrines, n.40)*, p.76

Then also neighbours began to join friendship amongst themselves in their eagerness to do no hurt and suffer no violence, and asked protection for their children and womankind, signifying by voice and gesture with stammering tongue that it was right for all to pity the weak. Nevertheless concord could not altogether be produced, *but a good part indeed the most, kept the covenant unblemished, or else the race of mankind would have been then wholly destroyed, nor would birth and begetting have been able to prolong their prosperity to the present day.*⁹³

As cited above, (see footnote 92) Epicurus points out the importance of securing of a society from outside assaults. Of course, this would be the same in the level of individuals. Epicurus asserts that, “[i]t is impossible for the one who instills fear to remain free from fear.”⁹⁴ Knowing that fear is a menace to the ultimate good, i.e., *ataraxia*, it can be said that, in his view, any one who would impose power on others, will never acquire peace. One, who uses fear (force) toward others, will be in constant anxiety of others’ responses, and so he/she would not be able to manage to secure a state of peace; nor can he/she secure peace of mind. As I have stated before, Hobbes is very much influenced by Epicurean philosophy. In his *Leviathan* Hobbes says that in the state of nature, as a “fundamental law of nature,” “every man has right to everything” and therefore “there is always war of every one against every one.”⁹⁵ “Therefore,” says Hobbes,

as long as this natural right of every man to every thing endures, there can be no security to any man of living out the time which nature ordinarily allows men to live, no matter how strong or wise the man might be. Consequently it is a precept or general rule of reason, *that every man, ought to endeavor for peace as far as he has hope of obtaining it, and when he cannot obtain it, he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war.* The first branch of this rule contains the first and fundamental law of nature, which is to seek peace and follow it. The second branch is the sum of the rights of nature, which are, by all means we can, to defend ourselves.⁹⁶

⁹³ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse, Cambridge, Harvard Uni. Press, pp.457-9 (Emphasis is added)

⁹⁴ *The Essential Epicurus, (Fragments, n.84)*, p.101

⁹⁵ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Marshall Missner, New York, Pearson Longman, 2008, pp.83,86

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.87

He asserts that under constant fear of death, all people by their free will accept a social contract, and thus leave the state of nature and form a civil society. This social contract is nothing but the system of justice, which will provide a state of peace. An important point to be mentioned in Hobbes's explanation is that in the state of nature, *right* precedes *law*. Hobbes's refusing of force as a means of self-preservation (or as a means of morality) is in line with the logical conclusion of Epicurus' thought. For both Epicurus and Hobbes, power cannot suffice for security, no matter how strong a man is. It follows from these considerations that Epicurus does not accept *power* as a reasonable means of possessing, or providing something for oneself, i.e., power cannot produce right. By using force, one may have tentative advantages with respect to others, but a permanent anxiety would follow which is definitely an impediment to happiness.

Thus having eliminated the first two possibilities, i.e., to count on *non-detection*, and/or *power*, the only way Epicurus advises men to provide themselves something with the secure protection from other men is to look for *others' consent*. If in a society an action of someone is deemed as a *natural good* under the condition of *others' consent* (of course here it should be granted that everyone is acting with goodwill) then it is obvious that equality, i.e., justice reigns in that society. In other words, as long as some people in the society think that there is partiality (injustice), they do not give consent to those actions, which they think are not just, and consequently the performers of these actions cannot provide themselves something with secure protection of others. Therefore, it would not be wrong to draw the conclusion that for Epicurus *natural good* is based on a *self-interest*, which necessarily takes *equality (justice)* into account. At the deepest level, the driving motive is self-interest, but as long as there are interest of others (and therefore as long as the others stand there as a possible source of menace), to secure a life in peace which is ultimate good for everyone, a compromise on the basis of equality (justice) appears as a necessity. That is, in Epicurus' view, one cannot secure a tranquil life without being a just person. As I have stated before, Epicurus contends that it is impossible to live happily without being virtuous and

conversely it is impossible being virtuous without living happily.⁹⁷ Again he says that “[t]he just man is the most free of perturbation, while unjust man is full of the greatest disturbance.”⁹⁸ This means that when Epicurus says that “pleasure is the beginning and the goal of a happy life” he does not mean that a blind pleasure of any sort must be pursued. However, we should not forget that, in his view, no pleasure is *per se* bad. Rather, he thinks that, every pleasure is good *per se*, but it is an expected bad consequence, that prevents pleasure to be choiceworthy. For example, one can steal another person’s money and with this money, he/she would have fun. But according to Epicurus the anxiety of a possible detection and punishment would inevitably follow and disturb happiness of the wrongdoer. He says that as this pain outweighs the previous pleasure one should be prudent about the pleasures that should be pursued or avoided. From Epicurus’ point of view, body with its desires (pleasures) is not a source of evil as some philosophers contend. It is known that some rationalist philosophers regard *body* as if it is the prison of *reason*. They despise every kind of bodily desires. The Stoics, for example, are indifferent to pleasure in attainment of the ultimate goal, which, they contend, is virtue.⁹⁹ As we have seen before, Epicurus though does not reject any kind of pleasures, nevertheless sets limits to pleasure. Enjoyment of pleasure should not do harm any other person or oneself. In his answer to (probably) one of his disciples, we see him giving an explanation of these limits:

You tell me that the movement of your flesh is too inclined towards sexual intercourse. *So long as you do not break the laws or disturb proper and established conventions or distress any of your neighbours or ravage your body or squander the necessities of life, act upon your inclination in any way you like.* Yet it is impossible not to be constrained by at least one of these.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ *The Essential Epicurus, (Principal doctrines, n.5), p.70*

⁹⁸ *Ibid, (Principal doctrines, n.17), p.71*

⁹⁹ *Mutluluk Ahlakı, pp.75-6*

¹⁰⁰ *The Hellenistic Philosophers, (Epicurus, Vatican sayings), p.116 (Emphasis is added)*

The limit to any enjoyment of pleasure, according to Epicurus, is *not breaking* the laws or established conventions, *not distressing* any neighbors and not ravaging one's body. If these conditions are satisfied one can very well enjoy whatever pleasure he/she wishes. It is important to mention that the priority is not given to enjoyment of pleasure (*individual good, subjective will*) rather it is given to the obedience to law (*common good, objective will*). But obedience to law will bring happiness (pleasure) to everyone in the long run. Again, one of Epicurus' fragments says that "[t]he tranquil man is not troublesome to himself or to another."¹⁰¹ Here 'another' implies obviously all humanity. This means that, for Epicurus *one's own happiness* at least requires that one should not do any harm to any other person. The conclusion that can be drawn from all these fragments is that, according to Epicurus the necessary condition of a tranquil life (i.e., happiness) is justice (i.e., conventions or laws). In other words, it can be argued that the *self-interest* (or one's own happiness) that Epicurus points out is *not* an egoistic self-interest which disregards others' interests. Again, this means that Epicurus' ethics is not, as Kant contends, a self-love ethics which legitimizes opportunistic behaviors detrimental to others, but rather propounds a state of peace (of mind) for all. Of course this is a negative conception of morality which is based on not to disturb others. Is there also, for Epicurus, a positive conception of morality which is based on responsibility towards others? Epicurus depicts one's responsibility towards others especially under the concept of *friendship*. We will see that in his account of friendship Epicurus supports some principles which sound altruistic. But before examining the view of Epicurus on friendship it will be convenient to turn first to Epicurus' account of *justice*.

3.1.3.1. Justice as a Social Contract

I have argued above that for Epicurus one necessary condition for securing a good life is to seek others' consent. But how can one get the consent of others when doing something, the consequences of which somehow affect these others as well?

¹⁰¹ *The Essential Epicurus, (Vatican sayings, n.79), p.85 (Emphasis is added)*

Does one in each unique case ask for others' consent? Though this is the principle, which, in my view, should be underneath the Epicurean system, its impracticality is also obvious. This (i.e., seeking consent of others) of course can be done by acting in accordance with the laws which are nothing but the written consent of all people in the society.

Epicurus does not accept an ideal conception of justice or law as Plato and Kant do. In his view, there can never be everlasting laws which are prior or above human experience. His conception of justice is empirical and based on a mutual contract among men, and in this regard, laws are the product of human experience and have to serve for general advantage of people. According to Epicurus, “[t]here is no such thing as “justice in itself”; it is rather, always a certain compact made during men’s dealings with one another in different places, not to do harm or to be harmed.”¹⁰² He emphasizes the instrumentality of justice many times in his writings: For instance, he argues that, “[i]f someone makes a law which does not result in advantage for men’s dealings with each other, it no longer has the nature of justice.”¹⁰³ This means that justice, or any law has to serve people to secure a life in peace. In a sense, for Epicurus *what is useful is good* and *what is good should be useful as well*. However, it should be noted that the advantage that Epicurus is pointing is not a unilateral (a selfish) advantage, rather the advantage of all parties; i.e., law is impartial and bounds everybody alike. Therefore, it can be concluded that for Epicurus, laws have *universal*¹⁰⁴ validity and demand universal

¹⁰² *The Essential Epicurus, (Principal doctrines, n.33), p.74*

¹⁰³ *Ibid, (Principal doctrines, n.37), p.75*

¹⁰⁴ Of course, what is here meant by “universal” is not that Epicurus has a conception of universality in the sense that this universality comprises all people in the world. Epicurus definitely wrote for the Greek *polis*. The word universal here is used in the sense of *a set of people*, (e.g., a society or a polis) which together decide the law. Obviously, in his writings we see that for him there are still foreigners, others. But here what is held to be important is the *logical consequences of the ideas*, not their historical context. Therefore, it would not be wrong to accept that Epicurus is addressing to all humanity. In this respect, what Diogenes of Oenoanda, an Epicurean, said is revealing: “In relation to each segment of the earth different people have different native lands. But in relation to the whole circuit of this world the entire earth is a single native land for everyone, and the world a single home.” (See *Hellenistic Philosophers*, p. 133)

obedience. Universal in the sense that there is no exception that can be used as a pretext to break the law. It is not legitimate that anyone should break the law for the sake of his/her own interest. The instrumentality of justice is its overall goodness for securing peace for society and thus for each individual. This instrumentality does not mean that each individual can violate law in an expectation of self-advantage. In this regard, for Epicurus laws are *prior* to any individual interest. Because he thinks that so long as there is no justice in the society, one cannot have the possibility of a perfect happiness, a tranquil life. In the Epicurean system of morality, the relation between justice and peace can be summarized as follows: No justice no peace. Surely, if there is no peace there will be no happiness.

As Epicurus asserts that justice is a compact, which is decided by all people who live together, he maintains that it can be changed or arranged in accordance with the needs of people. He says that with time and place human needs can change, and likewise the laws, which are nothing but the commands of justice, have also to be changed. In other words, laws must be compatible with human needs:

Where actions that were considered just are shown not to fit the conception (of justice) in actual practice- provided circumstances are not altered- they are not just. But where, once events have changed, the same actions once held to be just are no longer advantageous, they were just at the same time when they brought advantage to citizens, dealing with one another; but later they were no longer just, when they brought no advantage.¹⁰⁵

In the coming pages, we shall see that, for Kant, (moral) law is a pure principle of reason, which has nothing to do with human experience. In his view, each unique person, as a rational being, has the capacity to represent (or to legislate) the moral law. He contends that the moral law would not be a product of agreement among people. According to him, reason can realize what is *per se* good and evil even without any reference to experience. On the other hand, it can be said that in Epicurus' view, reason *by nature* has (and needs) no law. Every living being by

¹⁰⁵ *The Essential Epicurus, (Principal doctrines, n.38), p.75*

nature seeks for pleasure, i.e., absence of pain. It is only contact with others, in a sense *force (fear)* of others (and/or *love, sympathy* towards others), which compels man to accept law. In this regard, as Hobbes later would formulate, right (or self-interest) precedes law.¹⁰⁶ Epicurus says that, “[i]njustice is not evil in itself but in the fear and apprehension that one will not escape from those appointed to punish such actions.”¹⁰⁷ So according to him justice (law) is no an *unhistorical* reality. Justice (or prudence, or else virtue) is something that man is compelled to (and should) learn. Epicurus must have observed that children have no real sense of justice (law) and they mainly seek after pleasure. With time and through education (*via* punishments and rewards) of their parents and of society, they learn to obey a certain set of rules.

We know that for Epicurus the ultimate goal of life is pleasure, i.e. absence of pain. However, if not organized by laws, these different demands for pleasure (happiness) inevitably would result in a conflict with each other. In a state of uncontrolled conflicts, it is certain that nobody would be able to secure a life in peace, which in Epicurus’ view would obviously be contrary to the nature of human beings. By “sober reasoning” men should find the means to eliminate (or control) these conflicts and provide a state of peace for all. I argue that in the moral system of Epicurus it is impossible for anyone or any group of persons to secure a perfect happiness by seeking only for self or group interest. The logical outcome of Epicurus’ system entails happiness for all people. What Epicurus says is that every individual seeks after his/her self-interest (self-happiness), but a perfect happiness (a tranquil life, *ataraxia*) would be impossible without letting the others also enjoy happiness. As I have stated before, according to Epicurus, happiness and virtue (justice) are reciprocal conditions of one another and the natural good is something that one provides him/herself with the secure protection from others. This is nothing but accepting/seeking the consent of others. He says that, “[t]he just man is most free of perturbation, while the unjust man is full of the

¹⁰⁶ See *Leviathan*, pp.86-7

¹⁰⁷ *The Essential Epicurus, (Principal doctrines, n.34), p.74*

greatest disturbance.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, Epicurus begins with pleasure and arrives at virtue (justice), by depicting virtue as a necessary condition for the attainment of pleasure.

As laws are not innate and the *perception (meaning) of good* may vary for everyone, the laws that will serve to the common benefit of all people must be decided by consensus. But there arise some questions, to which we do not see any answers in Epicurus’ writings: Is there a possibility of such a law which can eliminate all conflicts of interest? If we put it in a different way, is there a possibility of a law, which equally represents all particular wills or desires? How are these laws decided? Are these laws decided by vote? If the laws are accepted by votes and unanimity is not the case, what can be said about the interests of the minority?

3.1.3.2 Friendship or Responsibility toward Others

The responsibility toward others, in other words the positive aspect of morality in Epicurean philosophy is discussed under the concept of *friendship*. “It is essential to remember that friendship, in its Graeco-Roman usage, has a political resonance absent from the modern concept.”¹⁰⁹ The rival schools of philosophy blames the Epicurean philosophers for seeing friends as means, in a similar way as the Epicureans accept virtue as a means for happiness. But this idea does not do justice to Epicurean philosophy on this issue. On the contrary, Epicurus emphasizes repeatedly the intrinsic worth of friendship. In fact, what Epicurus says about friendship will help us to understand his moral philosophy better. He says that “[a]ll friendship is desirable for itself, but it begins with need.”¹¹⁰ I think this is compatible with the rest of Epicurean system of morality. For example, in his

¹⁰⁸ *The Essential Epicurus, (Principal doctrines, n.17), p.71*

¹⁰⁹ *The Hellenistic Philosophers, (a comment by Long and Sedley), p.137*

¹¹⁰ *The Essential Epicurus, (Vatican sayings, n.23), p.79*

view, justice is a means for a tranquil life; nevertheless, it is at the same time a necessary condition of a tranquil life. This necessity shows that justice has also (though relative) an intrinsic worth. In a similar manner, though friendship “begins with need”, with time it gets an intrinsic worth. Here some questions can be directed to Epicurus: Do not other people, who are not friends, have any worth? Can they be treated as means only? Epicurus’ answer would be as follows: Justice (law) is a compact, which come into force with the agreement of all people in the society. The obedience to laws (as it is a must) is nothing but respect to other people. It is impossible for anyone to reach *ataraxia*, by doing harm to other people. Therefore, respect for others is a necessary condition of one’s happiness. Obviously, friendship has something more than respect. It is something, which has to do with sympathy, love. Other people are not only the source of fear but they may also be friends. Being your fellow citizens, (even if they are not your friends) you ought to do no harm to them, but they may as well be your friends and you may do more for them than not to harm them. One may wonder whether in an Epicurean world all people would be friends. Or is friendship something irreducible to the public realm and has to belong only to private relations?

Epicurus says that “[t]he wise man suffers no more pain by being tortured himself than by seeing a friend being tortured.”¹¹¹ Again, Diogenes Laertius reports, there would be occasions where the Epicurean wise man dies for his friend.¹¹² This intrinsic worth of friends in fact indicates the intrinsic worth of life. Life of a human being has an intrinsic value. It is important to remember here that Epicurus finds it impossible to achieve *ataraxia* without being virtuous (just). Some late critiques of Epicurus blame him for advising a life of a pig. Seneca’s testimony enables us to draw quite the contrary conclusion: “He [Epicurus] says you should be more concerned at inspecting whom you eat and drink with, than what you eat

¹¹¹ *The Essential Epicurus, (Vatican sayings, n.56), p.82*

¹¹² *The Hellenistic Philosophers, p.133*

and drink. For feeding without a friend is the life of a lion and a wolf.”¹¹³ It can be inferred that for Epicurus life has a worth and must be lived in an honorable way and not in the way beasts live. He does not advise a life of any kind (e.g. a long life without regarding its cost, as he rejects the idea of an afterlife); rather for him, the quality of life is also important. One should live justly, respect others, and fulfill his/her necessary desires.

3.2. Kant’s Ethical Theory

We have seen in the first chapter that in his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant tries to persuade his readers that, as the knowledge of a priori (universal and necessary) propositions of mathematics and laws of nature are possible by virtue of the concepts of understanding, reason can legitimately prescribe a priori moral law as well. This moral law is nothing but the sign, if I say it in Kant’s own words, “the *ratio cognoscendi*” of freedom. After an elaboration of this moral law, Kant uses it as a foundation stone upon which he will build all his edifice of metaphysics of morals. Now we are going to see how Kant undertakes this task.

3.2.1. The Moral Law

Kant asserts that the moral law of reason presents us with a synthetic a priori proposition. He explains the similarity of the formation of this proposition with the formation of the propositions of mathematics and the laws of nature as follows:

This is similar to the way in which concepts of the understanding, which by themselves signify nothing but lawful form in general, are added to intuitions of the world of sense and make possible synthetic a priori propositions on which all knowledge of nature is based.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (Seneca, *Letters*), p.127

¹¹⁴ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans.A. Zweig), p.253

Kant thinks that, in this way, (i.e., by virtue of a priori principles), the possibility of a metaphysics which has the rigor of a science is secured, and skepticism of all kind (especially which is posed by Hume) will once and for all be refuted satisfactorily. Though Kant claims there is a similarity between “synthetic a priori propositions on which all knowledge of nature is based” and a priori moral law of reason, we will see that there are differences, which cause confusion about the soundness of this claim. It is well known that in Kant’s theory of knowledge, the concepts of understanding synthesize what they get from experience, and without this sensuous content, the concepts, he says, would be empty. As we are going to see, Kant vehemently rejects any empirical content in the formation of the moral law, which stirs the accusations about the emptiness of the moral law.

Kant maintains that, as moral law must hold for every rational being, (i.e., absolutely necessary and universal), it must be derived from the “universal concept of a rational being.” He goes on to say that in this way the whole of ethics should, at first, be expounded as pure philosophy, that is as metaphysics. And this, according to him, is the sole possible way of the objectification of morality. As we are going to see, Kant who starts from freedom (moral law) finally arrives at the Idea of God and the Idea of immortality of the soul, in other words, his ethics, in a sense, culminates in religion. That is, morality this time is not derived from the Idea of God, but the Idea of God, as a postulate of reason, is derived from morality. It is argued by some that, Kant had made a second Copernican revolution this time in moral philosophy.¹¹⁵ However, it can also be argued that Kant’s all endeavor is, in a sense, to depict a morality which is an exposition of his Christian (puritan) faith, (though he asserts that it is a product of pure reason).

Kant divides ethics in two parts, namely empirical and rational parts. He says that philosophy is empirical if it is based on experience and it is *pure* if it sets forth its

¹¹⁵ See Roger J. Sullivan, *Immanuel Kant’s Moral Theory*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.45, 97

teachings entirely on the basis of *a priori principles*.¹¹⁶ Kant calls the empirical part of ethics practical *anthropology* and the rational part of ethics *moral philosophy*. It would not be wrong to say that the hallmark of the Kantian ethics is its emphasis on the rationality of human beings. Reason, in its pure form, is the basis of that which is universal and necessary and senses (or body) represent only contingency. In this regard, Kant claims that moral law cannot be derived from the particular characteristics of human nature. “A rational nature distinguishes itself from others by the fact that it sets itself an end. That end would be the matter for every good will. ... [T]he proposed end must here be conceived, not as an end to be produced, *but as a self-sufficient end*.”¹¹⁷ For Kant this self-sufficient *end* cannot be happiness, which is deemed as ultimate good by many philosophers. I have said above that in Kant’s view moral law, if it to be objectively valid “has to carry with it absolute necessity” and must be valid not merely for human beings but for all *rational beings*. Instead of words such as “man” or “human being”, Kant’s using “rational being” is not without purpose. As we have said above, Kant’s account of morality can be read as a metaphysical exposition of his Christian faith, but an exposition, which he claims, stays within the limits of reason alone. He tries to persuade his readers that the moral law of reason is, in fact, not different from what God commands; in other words, the arduous search for ideality, i.e., apriority of the moral law, (which is the heart of Kantian ethics) is not without purpose. In *the Metaphysics of Morals*, for example, Kant says that, “conscience must be thought of as the subjective principle of being accountable to God for all one’s deeds” and goes on to claim that “[t]he concept of religion is here for man only ‘a principle of estimating all his duties as divine commands.’”¹¹⁸ Certainly, Kant warns us that this idea does not entitle man “to assume that such a Supreme Being actually exists outside himself.” But the point of our emphasizing this aspect of Kant’s ethics, of course, is not to stir a prejudice against his ethical

¹¹⁶ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. A. Zweig), p.190

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.238

¹¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp.234-5

system, but that the mentioned aspect colors all his ethical system, i.e., his endeavor for an ideal moral law, his conceptions of the human being, of the nature and of reason. For example, the ideal, *Summum Bonum*, which he sets out for human beings, is a holy God (or holiness) and man's ethical vocation is to strive for the achievement of this perfection; and he finds all human feelings, desires as impediments (even we see him calling them as pathological) to this achievement. I will turn to these points later.

By furthering the rationality beyond human beings Kant draws the following consequence: “[T]he ground of obligation must here be sought, not in the nature of human beings or in facts about the way the world is, but solely a priori in concepts of pure reason.”¹¹⁹ The interesting point in this quotation is that Kant treats pure reason as if it is something, which resides out of human nature. Kant gives such a depiction of human nature as if there is a pure (ideal) *reason*, which can be abstracted or isolated from human nature, i.e., all desires (inclinations, emotions), and indeed from all human experience. As moral laws, according to Kant, have to be principles of pure reason, they must be different from all the rest of the practical knowledge, e.g., principles of prudence, for in this practical knowledge, he says, there is some “empirical element.” He emphasizes that all moral philosophy in this way should be based on non-empirical, i.e., pure, part of practical philosophy: “When applied to man, it does not borrow in the slightest from our knowledge of human beings (i.e., from anthropology). Rather, it prescribes to man, as a rational being, laws a priori.”¹²⁰

Kant argues that a free will, with nothing constraining or guiding it, determines its actions by moral laws. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* under the title of “The Canon of Pure Reason” Kant gives an account of his justification of the moral law by an appeal to moral judgment of every man:

¹¹⁹ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. A. Zweig), p.191

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p.191

I assume that there really are pure moral laws which determine completely a priori (without regard to empirical motives, that is to happiness) what is, and is not to be done, that is, which determine the employment of the freedom of a rational being in general; and that these laws command in an absolute manner (not merely hypothetically, on the supposition of other empirical ends) and are therefore in every respect necessary. I am justified in making this assumption, in that I can appeal not only to the proofs employed by the most enlightened moralists, but to the moral judgment of every man, in so far as he makes the effort to think such a law clearly.¹²¹

Kant says that, a metaphysics of morals is not necessary for a theoretical speculation but because morals are subject to every kind of corruption, without a supreme norm it will be impossible to appraise them correctly. Kant's opening sentence in *the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* emphasizes that a good will is the only thing, which has unconditional value: "It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a good will."¹²² He says that, intelligence, wit, courage, perseverance, decisiveness and the like qualities of a person are good and desirable in many respect but these qualities of temperament may as well be bad if the will, i.e., the character of the person is not good. Again power, wealth, honor may be useful in many respect but they may as well be the causes of bad consequences. Such qualities of character or conditions of one's well-being, Kant maintains, may be good for certain ends, but a good will is *good-in-itself*. That is, a good will is not desired for any other purpose, it is desirable for itself. Kant argues that a good will constitutes the indispensable condition of even worthiness to be happy and says that, "[a] good will is not good because of its effects or accomplishments, and not because of its adequacy to achieve any proposed end: it is good only by virtue of its willing- that is, it is good in itself."¹²³ In other words, for Kant that which has

¹²¹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp.636-7

¹²² Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. and trans. M.J. Gregor, Cambridge, Cambridge Uni. Press, 1999, p.49

¹²³ *Groundwork for Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans.A.Zweig), p.196

a moral worth is not the conditions in which a person lives or some temperamental talents which he/she has, but rather the *goodness of the person (i.e., virtue)*.

According to Kant, as rational beings human beings have a higher purpose than their self-preservation or well-being (happiness). Kant contends that if the natural constitution of human being were one that constituted purposively for life (i.e., happiness), then there would be no need for reason. In his view, when human beings are considered, there should be some intrinsic worth of being human, which is other than self-preservation. He argues that, “in a being that has reason and a will, if the proper end of nature were its preservation, its welfare, in a word its happiness, then nature would have hit upon a very bad arrangement in selecting the reason of the creature to carry out this purpose.”¹²⁴ Because all rules of action that the creature has to perform for this purpose, he contends, would be decided for it “far more accurately by instinct, and that end would have thereby been attained much more surely than it ever can be by reason.” These considerations at hand, Kant arrives at the following conclusion:

[I]f reason should have been given, over and above, to this favored creature, it must have served it only to contemplate the fortunate constitution of its nature, to admire this, to delight in it, and to be grateful for it to the beneficent Cause, but not to submit its faculty of desire to that weak and deceptive guidance and meddle with nature’s purpose.¹²⁵

In this way, Kant makes a sheer distinction between reason and sensation (desires, feelings). It is well known that, this is, in fact an old conception of man as a rational being, which dates back to the ancient Greek thought. According to this thought, reason represents divinity in man while feelings (desires) represent animality. Whatever pertains to desires is base, deceptive, weak, and certainly, must be evaded. It can be said that the core of Kant’s ethical system is its emphasis on human dignity, and of course, in his view, this dignity can be represented

¹²⁴ *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*), pp.50-1

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p.51

merely by reason and all inclinations can be menaces to this dignity. Kant contends that the true vocation of reason must be to produce a *will* that is good, not as a means to other ends, but as an end-in-itself. This *will*, he says, needs not to be the sole and complete good, yet it must still be the highest good and the condition of all the rest, even of all demands for happiness. Long before maturing his moral thought, Kant, already in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, had more or less the same view about the vocation of man. There he says that, “[m]an is destined by his reason to live in a society of other people, and in this society he has to cultivate himself, civilize, himself to a moral purpose by arts and sciences.”¹²⁶ Kant asserts that it is compatible with the wisdom of nature that the “cultivation of reason” which is required for producing a will, which is good in itself, may restrict in many ways the attainment of happiness. But by so doing nature, he contends that, does not violate its own purpose because, reason, when performing its true vocation, is capable of “its own peculiar kind of satisfaction.” This satisfaction stems from the fulfillment of a purpose which reason (without any intervention of inclinations) alone determines.¹²⁷ Here we see that the explanation of Kant is clearly teleological. This explanation tells us that, as a rational being, man has a vocation, which is other than self-preservation, and though this vocation may bring pain, the fulfillment of it would compensate this pain. Moreover, according to Kant reason has its peculiar kind of satisfaction, which is different from that of body, i.e., a pleasure aroused by desires.

But one cannot help arguing; as the human being does not have only reason, but desires (inclinations) as well, it is then incumbent on Kant to account for the purpose (or reason) of man’s having desires. Do not man’s emotions or desires pertain to this, in Kant’s terms, “wisdom of nature” which sets down purpose for the human being? As I have said before, this is nothing but another kind of

¹²⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1978, pp.241-2.

¹²⁷ *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*), p.52

traditional body-soul (reason) dualism. According to Kant what pertains to the body (i.e., desires, inclinations) has to be eliminated from the formation of moral law and morality has to be based solely on a priori (universal and necessary) principles of pure reason. In Kant's point of view, desires can only produce subjective recipes, but moral law which has to satisfy the condition of being valid for every rational being, can only be a product of pure reason. According to Kant, whether the physical power of man is sufficient or not, "reason can at least attain so far as to determine the will, and, in so far as it is a question of volition only, reason does always have objective reality."¹²⁸ On the other hand, Kant's contention that instinct is a more suitable *tool* (certainly Kant would refuse to use this term to refer to reason) than reason for self-preservation is obviously very dubitable and would easily be refuted. But let us postpone this discussion to the next chapter.

3.2.1.1. The Categorical Imperative

As according to Kant the supreme principle of morality is to cultivate a perfect will, Kant's ethical system, in a sense, is an account of the conditions of the attainment of this perfect will (i.e., the attainment of virtue). How can human beings act in accordance with the unconditional purpose of nature so that they fulfill the true vocation of reason?

Kant claims that there are three kinds of imperatives: "1. The problematic imperative says that something is good as a means to any given end... 2. The pragmatic imperative is an imperative by the judgment of prudence, and says that an action is necessary as a means to our happiness..."¹²⁹ These two kinds of imperatives, he maintains, are hypothetical. And the third one is the moral

¹²⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis W. Beck, New York, Maximilian, 1993, p.15

¹²⁹ *Lectures on Ethics*, p.50

imperative “3. The moral imperative expresses the goodness of the action in and for itself, so that moral necessitation is categorical and not hypothetical.”¹³⁰ Kant says that all moral necessitation is an obligation and this obligation is either from duty or from coercion. He maintains that since divine will is necessary regarding to morality, the obligation does not hold for divine will; on the other hand, human will, constrained by desires or inclinations, is not necessary but contingent. It is noteworthy that for Kant *reason* in all rational beings (i.e., including God) is the same (or has the same capacities), in other words, if the *human will* could be freed from all of human desires, and totally be under the command of pure reason, then it would act like a *divine will*. If we put it in a different way, when it is only a question of volition (and not that of physical power) there would be no difference between finite and divine will. Kant points out that,

Moral necessity is an objective necessity, but if it is also a subjective necessity [in the case of a divine will], it is no necessitation. It is an objective necessitation and an obligation only if the subjective necessity is contingent. All imperatives express the objective necessitation of actions which are contingent.¹³¹

In other words, the actions of morally imperfect will (e.g., human being) are contingent, and to be a *good will*, (i.e., to be virtuous) it must obey the moral imperative, which is objectively necessary. Therefore, moral law stands as an obligation before human beings and Kant tells us that this obligation can be performed either from *coercion* or from *duty*. He terms ‘the necessity of an act to be done out of *respect* for the law’ as *duty*, and contends that for an action to be moral it must be performed from duty, from *respect* to moral law, and not from fear (coercion). However, as moral law is a law which is prescribed by reason, this duty would be a self-imposed duty. According to him, even if the action is in conformity with the law but intended for another end other than *respect* to law, it cannot be deemed as moral. In other words, accordance with law does not suffice,

¹³⁰ *Lectures on Ethics*, p.51

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p.51

that is, the determining ground of the action must be *respect* to moral law. As the concept of duty (respect to moral law) determines the worth of any action, the result (the effect) of the action loses all its importance in the assessment of the moral worth of that action. Kant says that:

[T]he moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect expected from it. ... Nothing other than *the representation of the law* in itself, which can of course occur only in rational being, insofar as it and not the hoped-for effect is the determining ground of the will, can constitute the preeminent good we call moral.¹³²

In other words, the moral worth of an action does not depend on the actualization of the objective to be reached by that action, but solely on the *principle of volition*, which ought to be the sole motive of the action. Certainly, this deontological conception of morality, at first sight, seems in diametrical opposition to that of Epicurus. We have seen that according to Epicurus, in the final analysis, justice (law) has no intrinsic value; it has rather an instrumental value.

But, of course, this is not the whole of the picture and if we set out to compare both ethical systems at this point it would lead us to wrong conclusions. This problem is partly caused by the method Kant followed in the exposition of his moral system. He starts by making a sheer distinction between morality and happiness, and contends that morality is desirable only for its own sake. In this regard, Kant says that for an action to be deemed as moral, the hoped-for consequence of the action should not be the determining ground (incentive) of that action; the action must be performed solely from respect to moral law. At this stage of his exposition, one may think that Kant propounds a sheer deontological stance, but he cannot dispense with happiness and later, as we will see, incorporates happiness in his system, saying that the desire for happiness is an actual and necessary trait of human beings.

¹³² *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*), p.56

As Kant has the task of providing a priori moral law for human beings, he has to account for an incentive, which leads to obedience to moral law. And as he contends that every empirical influence must be excluded from the formation of moral law, this incentive must also be a product of pure reason. I have said above that, in Kant's view, for an action to be moral, it must be performed from respect to moral law. The concept of respect is the solution that Kant proposes for this problem. Kant realizes that some objection could be raised against the concept of respect and himself voices the question: Is not 'respect' a feeling, which has its roots negatively in fear and positively in some inclinations? He says that, "[i]t might be objected that instead of clearly resolving the question by means of concept of reason I have tried to take refuge in an obscure feeling, under the cover of the word respect."¹³³ Although Kant accepts that respect is a feeling, he thinks that this feeling is different in kind from those "caused by some (external) influence". He contends that while respect is a feeling, which is "self-generated" by reason all other feelings can be reduced to inclination or fear. Kant says that, "[t]he direct determination of the will by the law, and the awareness of that determination, is called 'respect', so we should see respect as the *effect* of the law on a person rather than as what produces the law."¹³⁴ He goes on to argue that *respect* "is neither an object of inclination nor an object of fear, though it is somewhat analogous to both."¹³⁵ Kant here tries to persuade his readers that the incentive, which leads to the moral law, is a self-generated incentive of reason. If he accepts fear or any other inclination, e.g., love against others, as the determining ground of moral law, then the moral law would not be pure and a priori but empirical. I will explore this issue in the coming pages.

Kant gives a portrayal of the categorical imperative as follows:

But what kind of law can that be, the representation of which must determine the will, *even without regard for the effect expected from it*, in

¹³³See footnote, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. A. Zweig), p.203.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.203

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p.203

order for the will to be called good absolutely and without limitation? Since I have deprived the will of every impulse that could arise for it from obeying some law, nothing is left but the conformity of actions as such with universal law, which alone is to serve the will as its principle, that is, *I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.*¹³⁶

Categorical imperative is characterized by an “ought” which expresses the objective necessitation of the act and indicates that if reason completely determined the will, the action would without exception take place according to the rule.¹³⁷ This imperative does not concern itself with the anticipated result of the action but rather with the form, i.e., with the principle which is the determining ground of the action. Though Kant gives some examples about the moral action under certain circumstances, he never gives a strict precept to be followed. And he asserts that we can never be able to know to what degree our actions conform to moral law.

Kant’s categorical imperative sounds very plausible and strong. Certainly, without any external compulsion, acting in accordance with a universal law reveals a perfect sense of equality or justice. However much it sounds strong theoretically there are problems, especially, about its applicability. As we are going to see in a moment, the categorical imperative, when assessed together with Kant’s other claims about moral law of reason, is still very questionable. It is well known that in search of a universal and necessary moral law of reason Kant breaks up with all that is empirical and comes up with a transcendently ideal categorical imperative. Now if I leave out everything which is empirical then how can I be certain that which is good for me is good also for every other unique rational being? If there is such a thing as common good, how does the cognition of this common good be possible if not empirically? In other words Kant has to solve the problem of *communication*. It is obvious that in Kant’s conception all rational

¹³⁶ *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*), pp.56-7 (Emphasis is added)

¹³⁷ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.18

beings have a capacity to legislate for all. In other words, it follows from this conception that in every instance of action there have to be only one possible way of action for all rational beings. Certainly Kant's categorical imperative implies not to infringe others' rights or interests. However, the problem is that who will decide about the *interest* or *good* for other? One may argue that Kant's vehement rejection of every empirical contribution to a priori moral law means that, it is I, who will decide what is good for others. Otherwise if I look for the consent of others, then Kant's contention about moral law's apriority would fail. If I leave out the consent of others in the formation of good (in Kant's point of view this empirical content would poison the purity of the moral law) would not this lead me to despotism? We are now going to search for some answers to these questions.

I have said that, in the search of a priori moral law of reason, Kant strictly rejects any contribution of human experience to this law. The problem is, in the first place, how can one be certain of the goodness of the action if we leave out all that pertains to sensation or feeling, and in the second place how can this *subjective good* be communicated with other rational beings? In other words, how can I be certain that this *subjective good* is at the same time an *objective good*? So it seems that before moral law, the concepts of *the good and the evil* must be known. Knowing that Kant rejects the rationalist claims about innate ideas; we can ask then, from where do human beings get the concepts of the good and the evil if not from experience? Kant is aware of this problem and explains how its being a danger to his ideal system as follows:

If the concept of the good is not derived from a practical law but rather serves as the ground of the latter, it can only be the concept of something whose existence promises pleasure and thereby determines the causality of the subject (the faculty of desire) to produce it. Now because it is impossible to see a priori which representation will be accompanied with pleasure and which with pain, *it would be solely a matter of experience to discern what is immediately good and evil*. The property of the subject, by virtue of which such experience could be had, is the *feeling of pleasure or displeasure* as a receptivity belonging to inner sense, thus the concept of that which is immediately good would only refer to that which the sensation of gratification is immediately associated, and the concept of

absolutely evil would have to be related only to that which directly excites pain.¹³⁸

Kant tries to overcome the problem by setting down a difference between the concepts of *good* and *well-being* (i.e., pleasant). According to him, while the authority which determines the first (i.e., the concept of the good) is reason, for the latter the authority is sensation (or feeling). In this regard, he asserts that there is a difference in kind between what he calls *practical good* and what is *pleasant*, “which influences the will solely through the medium of sensation as a result of purely subjective causes, effective only for the senses of this person or that, not as a principle of reason valid for everyone.”¹³⁹ He, therefore, contends that in order for the concepts of the good and the evil to be communicated universally, they must be judged by reason. According to Kant, sensations are “limited to individual subjects and susceptibilities”; moreover, pleasure and displeasure can only be known only by virtue of experience. In this way, he arrives at the conclusion that sensations (or feelings) cannot be accepted as a reliable base upon which a universal and necessary morality can be erected. As have been stated before Kant says that as a rational being man cannot satisfy with that which is pleasant (i.e., happiness) but must, first of all, seek for what is good-in-itself (virtue). As we are going to see, in his view, virtue is the necessary condition for attainment of happiness. The following long quotation would help us to understand the difficulty he faced in establishing a priori concept of the *good* for the moral law.

This is the place for an explanation of the *paradox* of method in a critical examination of practical reason. *The paradox is that the concept of good and evil is not defined prior to the moral law*, to which, it would seem, the former would have to serve as foundation; rather the concept of good and evil must be defined after and by means of the law. Even if we did not know that the principle of morality was a pure law determining the will a priori, we would nevertheless at the beginning have to leave it undecided whether the will has merely empirical or also pure determining ground a priori. ... Assuming that we wished to begin with the concept of the good

¹³⁸ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.60, (Stress is added.)

¹³⁹ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. A.Zweig), p.215

in order to derive the laws of the will from it, this concept of an object (as a good object) would designate this object as the sole determining ground of the will. But because this concept had no practical law a priori as its standard, the criterion of the good or evil could be placed only in the agreement of the object with our feeling of pleasure or displeasure, and the use of reason could only consist in part determining this pleasure or displeasure in connection with all sensations of our existence and in part in determining the means of providing ourselves with the object of these feelings. Now since, only through experience can we find out what is in accordance with the feeling of pleasure, and since by hypothesis the practical law is to be based on it, the possibility of a priori practical laws is excluded because it was thought necessary first of all to find an object for the will the concept of which, as a good object, would have to constitute the universal though empirical determining ground of the will.¹⁴⁰

Of course, Kant advises us another way and says that, contrary to what has been said in the above quotation, we first have to “investigate whether there was not also an a priori determining ground of the will which could have been found nowhere except in a pure practical law (... in so far as its mere lawful form prescribed maxims without reference to an object).¹⁴¹ And he goes on to explain how moral law (without any recourse to experience) determines the concepts of the good and the evil:

Had one previously analyzed the practical law, he would have found, on the contrary, not that the concept of the good as an object of the moral law determines the latter and makes it possible, but rather the reverse, i.e., that the moral law is that which first defines the concept of the good- so far as it absolutely deserves this name- and makes it possible. This remark, which refers only to the method of the deepest moral investigations, is important. It explains once and for all the reasons which occasion all the confusions of philosophers concerning the principle of morals.¹⁴²

How does one arrive at the decision to act from respect to law? In other words, what is the drive that leads a rational being to obey a moral law? Kant responds that, “how a law in itself can be the direct motive of the will (which is the essence

¹⁴⁰ *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 65-6 (Stress is added)

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.66

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p.66

of morality) is an insoluble problem for the human reason. It is identical with the problem of how a free will is possible”¹⁴³

Kant says that a free will, while acting in accordance with moral law of reason, rejects all “sensuous impulses” and checks all inclinations so far as they are in conflict with the moral law. According to him, this negative effect of the moral law on feelings produces a pain. He argues that “[h]ere we have the first and perhaps the only case wherein we can determine from a priori concepts the relation of a cognition (here a cognition of pure practical reason) to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure.”¹⁴⁴ Kant points out that besides this negative effect moral law there is also a positive feeling, which is generated as a result of respect to moral law. He claims that since moral law is in itself positive, (i.e., it is “the form of an intellectual causality”) it weakens self-conceit and thus is an object of respect. He asserts that, this feeling is not empirically originated therefore it can be known a priori. “Respect for the moral law, therefore”, says Kant, “is a feeling produced by an intellectual cause, and this feeling is the only one which we can know completely a priori and the necessity of which we can discern.”¹⁴⁵ In this way by the help of this (on the one side positive and on the other side negative) feeling human being can be aware of the moral law. Kant calls this feeling, which is self-generated by reason (i.e., not a sensuous product), *moral feeling*. Thus, he thinks that, objective moral law itself by virtue of this *moral feeling* provides the *subjective motive* for the moral agent. It is noteworthy that Kant somehow relates the moral law with the feelings of pleasure and pain.

I argue that Kant fails to give a proof of the moral law’s determining the concept of the good and evil. He just says that, “how a law in itself can be the direct motive of the will (which is the essence of morality) is an insoluble problem for the

¹⁴³ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.75

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.76

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.77

human reason.” Therefore, it can very well be argued that the apriority of the moral law is nothing but a postulate for Kant. But for the sake of the argument, let us accept for the moment that Kant has successfully accomplished the deduction of the moral law as a pure product of reason (i.e., without borrowing anything from experience). Still there is another problem, which Kant has to deal with. As stated before, Kant’s line of argumentation is as follows: Provided that the concepts of the good and the evil (which are now defined by the moral law) are judged by reason alone they can be communicated universally. In other words, the moral law, as a product of pure reason, should hold for all rational beings indifferently. The question to be posed here is that, even if one feels the apodictic certainty of moral law in his/her own actions, how can he/she be certain that other moral agents, too, would assess all actions in the same way he/she does? In other words, how can one be certain that his/her alleged a priori moral law is also an objective law, which holds for everybody alike? Again does it follow from what Kant says that one can (and has the right to) legislate for all?

Now let us further our quest by reiterating the following question: what kind of a law is this, allegedly universal and necessary, moral law? How is this objective moral law of reason put into the practice? Kant says that, “ethics does not give laws for *actions* but only for *maxims* of actions.” According to him, “the formal principle of duty in the categorical imperative” (i.e., so act that the *maxim* of your action could be a *universal law*) indicates that, “the concept of duty stands in immediate relation to a *law*.”¹⁴⁶ He goes on to claim that,

Ethics adds only that this principle [the formal principle of duty] is to be thought as the law of *your* own will and not of will in general, which could also be the will of others; in the latter case the law would provide a duty of Right, which lies outside the sphere of ethics. Maxims are here regarded as subjective principles which merely *qualify* for a giving of universal law, and the requirement that they so qualify is only a negative principle (not to come into conflict with a law as such)¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p.193

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.193

Kant asks “[h]ow can there be, beyond this principle, a law for the maxims of actions?” According to him, only “the concept of an *end* that is also a *duty*” can satisfy this condition. But as we are now going to see it is not so an easy task to give an account of this so-called “objective *end* which at the same time is a *duty*”.

In the *Groundwork* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant speaks of the concept of duty in general. In *the Metaphysics of Morals*, he now speaks of two different kinds of duties, namely, *duties of right* and *duties of virtue*. Kant says that “[t]o every duty there corresponds a right in the sense of an *authorization* to do something”, but this, he says, does not mean that every duty has with it the right to “coerce someone”. He claims that those duties to which “there correspond *rights* of another to coerce someone” are *duties of Right*. On the other hand, those duties, which necessitate only “self-constraint”, are duties of virtue. Kant maintains that, “[o]nly an *end* that is also a *duty* can be called a duty of virtue.”¹⁴⁸ “Kant goes on to argue that there are only two ends that are also duties, namely one’s own perfection and the happiness of others.”¹⁴⁹ This means that, according to Kant, “*one’s own perfection*” and “*the happiness of others*” stand as moral laws for all human beings. As according to Kant maxims of *one’s own perfection* (virtue) are good in themselves and can be known a priori, we accept that there is no problem of its serving as a moral law. But what about “*happiness of others*”? Kant himself maintains that the knowledge of maxims of happiness can be attained only by experience.¹⁵⁰ Who will decide about happiness of other? Is it he/she or I? In either case, i.e., if one decides for the other, there would be heteronomy of the will. In other words, one will impose on the other. Or is it a matter of consensus between him/her and me? In this case, this *end* which is at the same time a *duty* would itself

¹⁴⁸ *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p.188

¹⁴⁹ Paul Guyer, “Kant’s System of Duties”, *Cogito Özel Sayı: Sonsuzluğun Sınırında Immanuel Kant*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Yayınları Sayı 41-42, Kış 2005, pp.277-338

¹⁵⁰ *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp.19-20

be a product of an empirical agreement, rather than being a priori law of reason.

Kant explains the issue as follows:

When it comes to my promoting happiness as an end that is also a duty, this must therefore be the happiness of other men, whose (permitted) end I thus make my own end as well. It is for them to decide what they count as belonging to their happiness; but it is open to me to refuse them many things that they think will make them happy but that I do not, as long as they have no right to demand them from me as what is theirs.¹⁵¹

If maxims of happiness can be known only empirically, then one may ask: how can an empirically determined *end* serve as an a priori moral law? It seems that there arises a contradiction in Kant's system by his introducing *happiness of others* as a moral law for all maxims.

3.2.2. Justice and the Juridical Law

As, in my point of view, Kant is not successful to set down an ideally objective moral law of reason, I wonder whether he can establish this objectivity in the concept of juridical (civil) law. In this regard, I am now going to undertake a brief quest to see whether Kant gives a successful account of the concept of juridical law as being a product of pure reason (i.e., ideal and not empirical). In his *Rechtslehre* Kant says that in contradistinction to natural laws there are laws of freedom, which he names *moral laws*. Then he divides these laws of freedom into two categories and says that:

Insofar as they relate to mere external actions and their legality, they are called *juridical*; but if, in addition, they require that the laws themselves be the determining grounds of actions, they are *ethical*. Accordingly we say: agreement with juridical laws constitutes the *legality* of action, whereas agreement with ethical ones constitutes its *morality*. The freedom to which juridical laws relate can only be freedom in its external use; but the

¹⁵¹ *Metaphysics of Morals*, p.192

freedom to which ethical laws refer is freedom in both the internal and the external exercise of will, insofar as will is determined by laws of reason.¹⁵²

“Here Kant subsumes law and ethics under the more general category of morality, assigning both distinct spheres of moral competence.”¹⁵³ According to Kant juridical laws, too, as laws of freedom are based on a priori principles of pure reason. He asserts that empirical knowledge of laws may be helpful to some degree to understand these laws but, for a firm knowledge of justice, a theory, which is derived from purely empirical data, cannot be adequate.¹⁵⁴ Kant defines universal principle of justice as follows: “Every action is just that in itself or in its maxim is such that the freedom of the will of each can coexist together with the freedom of anyone in accordance with a universal law.”¹⁵⁵ But a juridical law is different from a moral maxim in that the former is externally enforceable while the latter rests on a subjective motive. What does this external force (in the case of juridical law) imply? If this force is the constituent element of the juridical law then would not this juridical law be empirically determined? To evade such a problem Kant asserts that “justice is united with the entitlement to use coercion”¹⁵⁶ as if this coercion is an a priori trait of justice. In other words, force (coercion) is not the cause of the law rather it is a right which stems from the a priori law. He says that,

Although experience teaches us that human beings live in violence and are prone to fight one another before the advent of external compulsive legislation, it is not experience that makes public lawful coercion

¹⁵² Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, trans. by John Ladd, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1999, p.13

¹⁵³ Katrin Flikschuh, “Kantian Desires: Freedom of Choice and Action in the Rechtslehre”, in *Kant’s Metaphysics of Morals Interpretative Essays*, ed. Mark Timmons, Oxford, New York, Oxford Uni. Press, 2002 p.194, pp, 185-207. As Kant calls both ethical and juridical laws *moral laws*, in the like manner, in this study, we will not make any differentiation between them, and treat both kinds of laws as moral laws.

¹⁵⁴ *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, p., 29

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.30

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.31

necessary. The necessity of public lawful coercion does not rest on a fact, but on a priori Idea of reason, for, even if we imagine to be ever so good natured and righteous before a public lawful state of society is established, individuals, nations, and states can never be certain that they are secure against violence from one another, because each will have his own right to do what seems just and good to him, entirely independently of the opinion of others.¹⁵⁷

We recall that Hobbes, as an eminent representative of the British empiricism, and a modern successor of Epicureanism, has founded all his theory of justice on the fear of death (as a consequence of the possibility of others' using force) which according to him is absolutely empirical. In a sense, justice, in his view, is a means which reason has produced for self-preservation. He explains the issue as follows:

The passions that incline men to peace are fear of death, the desire of such things as are necessary for commodious living, and the hope to obtain them by their industry. Reason suggests convenient articles of peace, by which men may be drawn to agreement.¹⁵⁸

In other words, it is fear of death (coercion) which leads to the idea of law, and thus law is nothing but a thoroughly empirical tool devised by reason.

Kant says that “[t]he legislative authority can be attributed only to the united Will of the people. Since all of justice ... is supposed to proceed from this authority, it can do absolutely no injustice to anyone.”¹⁵⁹ He maintains that when someone orders something to any other there is always a possibility of doing injustice. He says that one of the “juridical attributes inseparably bound up with the nature of a citizen as such is that the lawful *freedom* to obey no law other than one to which he has given his consent.”¹⁶⁰ According to him, since with a general united will of the people “each decides the same for all and all decide the same for each” there

¹⁵⁷ *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, p.116

¹⁵⁸ *Leviathan*, p.84-5

¹⁵⁹ *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, p.119

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.120

will be no injustice, for, he says, “he who consents cannot be injured.” What Kant here mentions as the *general will* implies obviously a unanimity of the opinions.¹⁶¹ Of course, this is the logical outcome of his thought. But what if there is no unanimity of opinions? If there is no unanimity, those who have minority opinion can be deemed as mistaken, in the same way as Rousseau argues in his *Social Contract*.

3.2.3. The Connection between Morality and Happiness

I have said that, Kant makes a sheer distinction between the principle of morality and that of happiness. However, he maintains that “this distinction of the principle of happiness from that of morality is not for this reason an opposition between them, and pure practical reason does not require that we should renounce the claims to happiness.”¹⁶² According to Kant, what this distinction requires is that whenever morality (duty) is in question one should never take “the claims to happiness” into account. He goes on to maintain that if the principles of happiness (which, he says, are all empirical) are introduced in the supreme principle of morality, this latter one loses all its moral worth.¹⁶³ In this way, Kant thinks that claims about happiness can and (ought to) be perfectly separated from principles of morality. As it has been stated before, in his view, a moral action must be performed from respect for moral law (i.e., from duty), and not even a slightest

¹⁶¹ In his *Rechtslehre* Kant makes a distinction between active and passive citizens and says that only active citizens have the right to vote. He counts the following people among passive citizens: “all women, generally anyone who must depend for his support (subsistence and protection), not on his own industry, but on arrangement ... by others- all such people lack civil personality, ..., the private tutor in contrast to the schoolteacher” (See Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*) p.120-1) As the range of this study is limited only to the logical implications and consequences of Ideas held by Epicurus or Kant, I find it unnecessary to introduce those ideas of the philosophers which as a result of their historical milieu deviate from their main ideas.

¹⁶² *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.97

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p.97

desire (interest) for any object (including happiness) be the motive of this action.

Kant says that:

[W]e encounter the paradox that, without any further end or advantage to be attained by it, the mere dignity of humanity as rational nature-and consequently respect for a mere Idea- should serve as an inflexible precept for the will; and that it is just this independence from any motivations based on his expectations of perfect happiness that constitutes the sublimity of a maxim and the worthiness of every rational subject to be a lawgiving member in the kingdom of ends; for otherwise he would have to be regarded as subject only to the natural law of his own needs.¹⁶⁴

Up to this point, Kant's conception of morality seems to be thoroughly deontological. Certainly this is not the whole of the story, and if I reiterate, he does (can)not dispense with happiness. He now tries to bridge what he has separated before. Indeed, his moral principle, which so far advises a morality as an end in-itself, now turns out to be as follows: Do that action through which you become *worthy to be happy*. In this way, virtue is related with happiness; a relation that says morality deserves happiness. In a sense, Kant now is seeking for an answer to this question: "If I so behave as not to be unworthy of happiness, may I hope thereby to obtain happiness?"¹⁶⁵ He says that, there is one *purpose*, which can be presupposed that all rational beings *actually* do have by a *natural necessity*: this purpose is *happiness*.¹⁶⁶ Just as the moral law is necessary in the practical employment of reason, in the same manner it is also "necessary to assume that everyone has ground to hope for happiness in the measure in which he has rendered himself by his conduct worthy of it, and that the system of morality is therefore inseparably ... bound up with that of happiness."¹⁶⁷ But Kant tries to persuade us that his conception of happiness is different from that of other philosophers, especially ancient Greek philosophers.

¹⁶⁴ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans.A. Zweig), p.239

¹⁶⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.638

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.638

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.638

Kant contends that the concept of 'highest good' has been ill understood by philosophers and this has caused much confusion. He says that the '*highest*' can mean the 'supreme', or the 'perfect'; while the former defines "the unconditional condition" the latter defines the whole, which itself is not "a part of a yet larger whole of the same kind."¹⁶⁸ Kant maintains that virtue is the supreme condition of happiness, but he adds that, this does not "imply that virtue is the entire and perfect good as the object of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings. For this, happiness is also required..."¹⁶⁹ So, according to Kant the concept of *highest good* (*Summum Bonum*), is a joint product of the concepts of *virtue* and of *happiness*. Kant now tries to give some characteristics of this unity, which according to him will help us to elucidate the true meaning of the *moral end*. He says that the unity of virtue with happiness must be regarded either as analytic (i.e., according to law of identity) or as synthetic (i.e., according to law of causality). Kant calls this the *antinomy* of practical pure reason and explains the difference between two alternatives as follows:

Either the endeavor to be virtuous, and the rational pursuit of happiness are not two different actions but absolutely identical; in this case no maxim is needed as a ground of the former other than that needed for the latter. Or that connection is predicated upon virtue's producing happiness as something different from the consciousness of virtue, as a cause produced an effect.¹⁷⁰

Kant says both the Epicureans and the Stoics held that virtue and happiness are one and the same thing but they differed only in selecting the fundamental principles of their systems: "The Epicurean said: To be conscious of one's maxims as leading to happiness is virtue. The Stoic said: To be conscious of one's virtue is happiness."¹⁷¹ Kant, on the other hand, rejects the identity of virtue and happiness,

¹⁶⁸ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.116

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.116

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.117

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, pp.117-8

and asserts that the maxims of virtue and the maxims of one's own happiness are "wholly heterogeneous and far removed from being at one in respect to their supreme practical principle; and even though they belong to a highest good, which they jointly make possible, they strongly limit and check each other in the same subject."¹⁷² In Kant's view, the *highest good* is a synthesis of concepts and this combination is known a priori, which means that it is practically necessary, and not derivable from experience. Kant, therefore, maintains that "the deduction of this concept [i.e., *highest good*] must be transcendental."¹⁷³

Kant draws a conclusion on the assumption that there are different conditions for achieving morality and happiness but he, himself too, gives no other principles for the attainment of happiness than that of morality. In other words, as in his view pursuing morality will automatically lead to happiness, why not then they be treated as identical? If morality is defined as worthiness to be happy, then how can there be other principles for achieving happiness? Of course, Kant would argue that this identity is only one directional; that is the reverse is not possible (the pursuit of happiness would not lead to virtue). However, we know that at least the Stoics say the same thing with Kant. They advise virtue, and say that virtue brings happiness. Again, as we have seen before, Epicurus, too, says that happiness is not attainable without virtue. The problem, in fact, lies in another place. Kant has in mind a different conception of happiness, which he equates with holiness of Christianity so that it can be achievable only by the help of God.

As Kant believes the connection between virtue and happiness is not analytic, but rather synthetic, (like a connection between a cause and its effect) he contends that we are left with two possibilities: Either "the desire for happiness must be the motive to maxims of virtue, or the maxims of virtue must be the efficient cause of

¹⁷² *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.119

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p.119

happiness.”¹⁷⁴ Kant’s contention is that, the first of these propositions is absolutely false, (as we have discussed before, Kant does not accept an external motive for a moral action), but the second one is not absolutely false, (false only in so far as this causality is taken as a causality in the world of sense, i.e., as in the case of the Stoics) Kant says that since as human beings we are justified in thinking of our existence as that of a noumenon in an intelligible world, and since we have in the moral law a pure determining ground of our causality,

it is not impossible that the morality of disposition should have an necessary relation as cause to happiness as an effect in the sensuous world; but this relation is indirect, mediated by an intelligible Author of nature. This combination, however, can occur only contingently in as system of nature which is merely the object of the senses and as such not sufficient to the highest good.¹⁷⁵

Kant says that the possibility of the connection between virtue and happiness “belongs wholly to the supersensible relations of things and cannot be given under the laws of the world of sense, even though the practical consequence of this Idea, i.e., the actions which are devoted to realizing the highest good, do belong to this world.”¹⁷⁶ He contends that in the realization of the highest good (“which is necessary according to practical principle”) something “is immediately in our power” but there is still something which “is beyond our power but which reason holds out to us as the supplement of our impotence” in the realization of the possibility of the highest good.¹⁷⁷

According to Kant, in a moral world, in which all hindrances to morality eliminated, there would be a general happiness. Since rational beings, under the guidance of moral principles would themselves “be the authors of their own-

¹⁷⁴ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.120

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.121

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, pp.125-6

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.126

enduring well being and of that of others.”¹⁷⁸ He says this ideal of moral world can be realized only under the condition that everyone behaves in accordance with moral law. But if everyone does not do what he ought to do, how then can this happiness of the one who obeys all the moral laws be secured? In Kant’s view, happiness in proportion to morality is only contingent in the world of senses; however, there must be a necessary connection between morality and happiness. He says that,

[T]he necessary connection of the hope of happiness with the necessary endeavor to render the self worthy of happiness cannot therefore be known through reason. It can be counted upon only if a Supreme Reason, that governs according to moral rules, be likewise posited as underlying nature as its cause.¹⁷⁹

Kant entitles “the idea of such an intelligence, in which the most perfect moral will united with supreme blessedness, is the cause of all happiness in the world”, as “the ideal of the supreme good.”¹⁸⁰ According to him, only in this ideal can reason find the ground of the connection of morality with happiness. But for the hope of the achievement of this ideal reason has to postulate the Idea of God and the Idea of a future life, i.e., immortality of the soul:

Since we are necessarily constrained by reason to represent ourselves as belonging to such a world [moral world], while the senses present to us nothing but a world of appearances, we must assume that moral world to be a consequence of our conduct in the world of sense (in which no such connection between worthiness and happiness is exhibited), and therefore to be for us a future world. Thus God and a future life are two postulates which, according the principles of pure reason, are inseparable from the obligation which that same reason imposes upon us.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.638

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp.638-9

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.639

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.639

Later, Fichte, who is deemed by many as the philosopher who has most properly understood Kant's moral philosophy, though finds it legitimate to postulate something like a moral world order, denies that a postulate of God is morally required or justified.¹⁸²

3.2.4. God and the Immortality of the Soul as Postulates of Reason

The Ideas of God and immortality of the soul are, according to Kant, conditions of the necessary object (the highest good) of a will, which is determined by the moral law. Even though we cannot have the knowledge of these ideas in a theoretical sense, "the possibility of these conditions [i.e., the Ideas of God and immortality of the soul] can and *must* be assumed in this practical context."¹⁸³ Kant says that through the concept of freedom, "the Ideas of God and immortality gain objective reality and legitimacy and indeed subjective necessity (as a need of pure reason)."¹⁸⁴ This need, Kant contends, is not just a hypothetical one for some arbitrary speculative purpose; "it is rather a need, with the status of a law, to assume that without which an aim cannot be achieved which one ought to set before himself invariably in all his action."¹⁸⁵

As we have seen, in Kant's view, "the complete fitness of dispositions to moral law," i.e., virtue, is the supreme condition of the highest good. Kant maintains that this complete fitness "must be just as possible as" the highest good. He contends that, "the perfect fit of the will to moral law is holiness, which is a perfection of which no rational being in the world of sense is at any time capable."¹⁸⁶ According

¹⁸² Daniel Breazeale, "Fichte and Shelling", in *Routledge History of Philosophy, V.6 The Age of German Idealism*, eds. R.C.Solomon and K.M.Higgins, London, New York, Routledge, 1993, pp.159-160

¹⁸³ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.4

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.4

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, pp.4-5

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp.128-9

to Kant, this “perfect fit of the will to moral law”, i.e., holiness, (which is required as practically necessary) can be reached only in *endless* progress towards it; therefore, “on principles of pure practical reason, it is necessary to assume such a practical progress as the real object of our free will.”¹⁸⁷

This infinite progress is possible, however only under the presupposition of an infinitely enduring existence and personality of the same rational being; this is called the immortality of the soul. Thus the highest good is practically possible only on the supposition of the immortality of the soul, and the latter, as inseparably bound to the moral law, is a postulate of pure practical reason.¹⁸⁸

Kant maintains that without the supposition of this infinite progress the moral law is completely degraded from its holiness, by being made out as lenient (indulgent) and thus compliant to our convenience. Although Kant says that holiness or a blessed life can never be achieved by any finite rational being, he goes on to maintain that one can nevertheless have a “prospect of a blessed future. For “blessed” is the word which reason uses to designate perfect well-being independent of all contingent causes in the world. Like holiness, it is an Idea which can be contained only in an infinite progress.”¹⁸⁹

Kant argues that the practical task of the reason is the achievement of the first part of the highest good, i.e., “morality; since this task can be executed only in eternity, it led to the postulate of immortality.”¹⁹⁰ He goes on to assert that, in a like manner, “the possibility of the second element of the highest good, i.e., happiness proportional to morality” must also be affirmed, and this affirmation necessarily leads us to the supposition of “the existence of a cause adequate to this effect.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp.128-9

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, pp.128-9

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.130 (footnote)

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.130

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.131

According to him, we have to postulate God “as necessarily belonging to the possibility of the highest good.”¹⁹² As man is not the cause of the nature, (among which there are human desires or feelings), and therefore, cannot bring the nature “into perfect harmony with his practical principles,” it is also necessary, says Kant, to postulate the existence of a cause of all nature, which is itself distinct from nature. This cause, which “contains the ground of the exact coincidence of happiness with morality,” is according to Kant, obviously God.¹⁹³ Kant points out that, it is not only “our privilege” but also a *moral necessity to assume the existence of God*. He defines this necessity as follows:

It is well to notice that this moral necessity is subjective, i.e., a need, and not objective, i.e., duty itself. For there cannot be any duty to assume the existence of a thing, because such a supposition concerns only the theoretical use of reason. It is not to be understood that the assumption of the existence of God is necessary as a ground of all obligation in general (for this rests as has been fully shown, solely on the autonomy of the reason itself). All that here belongs to duty is the endeavor to produce and to further the highest good in the world, the possibility of which may thus be postulated though our reason cannot conceive it except by presupposing a Highest Intelligence.¹⁹⁴

According to Kant, the Greek schools could never succeed in solving their problem of the practical possibility of the *highest good* because they think that human will can make its freedom the sole and self-sufficient ground of its possibility and thus there would be no need for the divine assistance. Kant says that they were correct in establishing the principle of morality by itself independently of the existence of God, but they were wrong in thinking that this principle was the entire condition of the possibility of the highest good. Kant criticizes the Epicureans as follows:

The Epicureans had indeed raised a wholly false principle of morality, i.e., that of happiness, into a supreme one, and for law had substituted a maxim

¹⁹² *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.131

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p.131

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.132

of free choice of each according to his inclination. But they proceeded consistently enough, in that they degraded their highest good in proportion to the baseness of their principle and expected no greater happiness than that which could be attained through human prudence (wherein both temperance and the moderation of inclinations belong), though everyone knows prudence to be scarce enough and to produce diverse results according to circumstances, not to mention the exceptions which their maxims continually had to admit and which made them worthless as laws.¹⁹⁵

Kant criticizes the Stoics as well, and claims that although they were correct in choosing their supreme practical principle, virtue, as the condition of the highest good, they mistakenly imagined that perfect virtue is completely attainable in this world. By so doing they exaggerated the moral capacity of man, “under the name of “sage”, beyond all the limits of his nature” and “they also refused to accept the second component of the highest good, i.e., happiness, as a special object of human desire. Rather, they made their sage, like a god in the consciousness of the excellence of his person, wholly independent of nature.”¹⁹⁶ According to Kant, the Stoics “left out of the highest good, the second element (personal happiness), since they placed highest good only in acting and in contentment with one’s own personal worth.”¹⁹⁷ I think that these accusations can legitimately be directed also to Kant. What is the role played by the concept of happiness in Kant’s ethics? It is depicted by Kant as if it is only a not-intended-for by-product of virtue. What is different in Kant from the Stoics is that Kant adds the postulates of ‘immortality of soul’ and of ‘God.’ Why should not one postulate the achievement of the virtue in a human life span instead of postulating immortality of the soul? Again, if for the attainment of the happiness a divine assistance is needed, then how can we talk of autonomy of the will?

Kant contends that Christianity, (“even when not regarded as a religious doctrine”) with its concept of the Kingdom of God provides a “sufficient” concept of the

¹⁹⁵ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.133

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp.133-4

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.134

highest good to “the strictest demand of practical reason.”¹⁹⁸ Kant asserts that, “the Christian principle of morality is not theological and thus heteronomous, being rather the autonomy of pure practical reason itself, because it does not make the knowledge of God and His will the basis of these laws.”¹⁹⁹ Thus, Kant maintains that through the concept of highest good as the ultimate goal of pure practical reason “the moral law leads to religion. Religion,” he says, “is the recognition of all duties as divine commands...”²⁰⁰ Kant introduces religion in his ethical system as the hope to participate in happiness with the following explanation.

Therefore, morals is not really the doctrine of how to make ourselves happy but of how we are to be worthy of happiness. Only if religion is added to it can the hope arise of someday participating in happiness in proportion as we endeavored not to be unworthy of it.²⁰¹

But when morals (which imposes only duties instead of providing rules for selfish wishes) is completely expounded, and a moral wish has been awakened to promote the highest good (to bring the Kingdom of God to us), which is a wish based on law and to which no selfish mind could have aspired, and when for the sake of this wish the step to religion has been taken- then only can ethics be called doctrine of happiness, because the *hope* for it first arises with religion.²⁰²

In this way, Kant’s ethics culminates in religion. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Kant depicts a morality which, he thinks, suits best to his Christian fait. It is important to mention once more Kant’s method. He first gives a strict deontological precept of virtue, but later introduces the concept of happiness in his system. I argue that with this introduction of happiness, Kant’s morality now turns out to have an instrumental value as well. Certainly, this discussion will be held in the coming chapter.

¹⁹⁸ *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp.134-5

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, pp.135-6

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.136

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.136

²⁰² *Ibid*, p.137

CHAPTER IV

4. A COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION OF ETHICAL SYSTEMS OF EPICURUS AND KANT

What should be the starting point of a comparison of Epicurus' and Kant's ethical systems? Before discussing specific issues, I think, it will be convenient to begin with an exposition of their respective conceptions of human life in general which will help us to understand their moral philosophies better. What does it mean to be human for Epicurus and Kant? As we are going to see, the difference between the answers given by both philosophers will throw some light on the differences between their views on other specific issues.

In one of his fragments, Epicurus says that, "[t]he voice of the flesh cries. 'Keep me from hunger, thirst, and cold.' The man who has these sureties and who expects he always will would rival even Zeus for happiness."²⁰³ Epicurus' gods live a life in perfect tranquility free from any want. So a life worthy of gods which according to Epicurus should be the ultimate goal of every human being, is a life which is lived in a perfect peace, a life in which all necessary bodily and mental wants are satisfied and external peace with other people is secured. Here Epicurus points out the importance of not being in any want, which is obviously the cause of pain for human beings. That is why, he says, every living being naturally avoids pain and seeks pleasure. Therefore, securing a life, which is free from any want (pain), would mean a life worthy of gods. Certainly, the problem is about the attainment of this end. According to Epicurus, man, by true reasoning, can (should) secure a good life. We should remember his emphasis on self-sufficiency of man from previous chapters. Epicurus maintains that all philosophy, virtue or prudence is only means for this end, i.e., the attainment of a tranquil life. This is, one can argue that, in fact nothing more than a modest precept for *self-preservation*. Of course, Epicurus himself does not use the concept of self-

²⁰³ *The Essential Epicurus, (Vatican sayings,n.33)* p.80

preservation. As an atomist philosopher, he rejects all kind of teleological explanations, i.e., explanations which assign purposes to man beyond life. In other words, Epicurus does not attribute any worth or value to life other than life itself. Life has to be lived (preserved) in a good way, in a tranquil state. This is what the natural constitution of living beings (including humans) necessitates. As we have seen in the first chapter, according to Epicurus the soul, too, is composed of atoms, and it does not survive the body's death. This means that, there is no afterlife and no reward or punishment awaiting human beings. In other words, Epicurus' conception of life is thoroughly naturalistic and excludes any kind of teleological accounts. In his view, apart from securing a tranquil life, which amounts to fulfillment of that which nature imposes on man, there is no vocation of man. Just as the perfect gods have no interest in universe, human beings, too, need no such vain interests.

But how can man secure a life in peace, a life without any bodily and mental disturbance? Epicurus says that, first of all we have to be aware of our true nature. By sober reasoning, we can examine what nature imposes on us and so we can differentiate between our natural and vain, (and between necessary and unnecessary) desires. In the second place, we live in a physical world and this physical world, if not correctly understood, can be the source of many empty fears, i.e., mental disturbances, which are surely impediments to a happy life. The fear of death or fear from gods are of such kind. In his view, the atomistic conception of the world (including the soul) enables human beings to dispel such empty fears. Thirdly, there are others, with whom we have to live together or share the world. So we have to find the ways of conduct which at least secure us from the assaults of others. Of course we have also responsibilities towards others, e.g., to our friends or relatives. If I sum it up briefly, Epicurus claims that if we have a true knowledge of our own nature and of the nature which surrounds us (i.e., other human beings and physical world) it would not be difficult at all to reach *ataraxia*, i.e., a happy life, a life in peace.

As for Kant, he contends that if the natural constitution of human being is one that constituted purposively for life (i.e., for self-preservation or happiness), then there would be no need for reason. According to him, what is important is not the *well-being* of man but being a *good man*. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, Kant argues that, “in a being that has reason and a will, if the proper end of nature were its preservation, its welfare, in a word its happiness, then nature would have hit upon a very bad arrangement in selecting the reason of the creature to carry out this purpose.”²⁰⁴ Because all rules of action that the creature has to perform for this purpose, he contends, would be decided for it “*far more accurately by instinct and that end would have thereby been attained much more surely than it ever can be by reason.*”²⁰⁵ Beginning with this premise, Kant arrives at the following conclusion:

[I]f reason should have been given, over and above, to this favored creature, it must have served it only to contemplate the fortunate constitution of its nature, to admire this, to delight in it, and to be grateful for it to the beneficent Cause, but not to submit its faculty of desire to that weak and deceptive guidance and meddle with nature’s purpose.²⁰⁶

This quotation obviously sounds a bit religious, which is diametrically opposed to Epicurus’ atomist view. Kant argues that as a rational being, man ought not to set before him the attainment of happiness as an ultimate *end*, because, he thinks, this renders his person to a means and thus degrades his dignity. According to Kant, the true vocation of reason must be producing a *will*, which is good-in-itself. He says that attainment of this *good will* may even restrict in many ways the attainment, (at least in this life), of happiness. However, by so doing nature, Kant argues, does not violate its own purpose because reason, when performing its true vocation, enjoys “its own peculiar kind of satisfaction.” This satisfaction stems from the fulfillment of a purpose which reason, he asserts, without any intervention of inclinations (i.e., desires), alone determines.

²⁰⁴ *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*), pp.50-1

²⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p.51 (Emphasis is added)

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.51

By the way, one may ask how Kant can be so certain that for the self-preservation of man or for the attainment of happiness instinct serves better than reason. I argue that Epicurus would have rejected this view. There is much contrary evidence, which shows that reason serves far much better than instinct. For example due to adverse conditions in winter, many animals die of hunger or cold while human beings do very well survive in the same condition. It is beyond any doubt that the whole civilization, which has been erected by man, in a sense, is nothing but the conditions which enhance the subsistence (the self-preservation) of man in general. It follows that as the premise, which Kant above gives for his argument, is so weak to be true, the conclusion is, likewise, too weak to be true. In other words, Kant's appointment of a vocation for reason is not so plausible.

Another point, which has to be clarified, is that while Kant tries to find a purpose for reason he seems to be forgetting to give purpose for the faculty of desire or sensations. A conclusion, which one can draw from the above quotation, is that Kant seems to be treating desires or sensations as if they are redundant or even deceptive and thus impediment to human perfection. At this stage, Kant's depiction of morality is such that, it has nothing common with happiness. (But as we will see, Kant cannot escape introducing happiness into his system) According to him, the maxim of virtue and the maxim of happiness are thoroughly different in kind. In this way, we see him dividing virtue (morality) and happiness in two different realms. Kant contends that any ethical system, which aims at happiness as the highest good, cannot produce moral laws. Why does Kant make such a sheer distinction between the principles of morality and the principles of happiness? Kant says that a moral law must hold for every rational being, that is, it must be universal and necessary. As it has been mentioned in previous chapters, Kant, in his theory of knowledge, tries to find a solution to Hume's fatal skeptical conclusion. As is known, Hume asserts that from experience we can never reach universal and necessary propositions. What have been accepted as universal and necessary, he contends, is nothing but a generalization derived from mere habits.

Kant, on the other hand, tries to show that the necessity and universality of some propositions do not stem from experience but that it is the concepts of the faculty of our understanding which make a priori (universal and necessary) propositions possible. In other words, in Kant's view, universality and necessity can never be acquired empirically. In the same manner, as Kant thinks that, maxims of happiness can only be known by experience, they can never be known priori and thus never be universal and necessary. He explains the issue as follows:

The principle of happiness can indeed give maxims, but never maxims which are competent to be laws of the will, even if universal happiness were made the object. For, since the knowledge of this rests on mere data of experience, as each judgment concerning it depends very much on the very changeable opinion of each person, it can give general but never universal rules; that is, the rules it gives will on the average be most often the right ones for this purpose, but they will not be rules which must hold always and necessarily. ... it refers to and is based on experience. Hence the variety of judgment must be infinite. This principle, therefore, does not prescribe the same practical rules to all rational beings, even though all the rules go under the same name- that of happiness. The moral law, however, is thought of as objectively necessary only because it holds good for everyone having reason and will.²⁰⁷

One thing to be mentioned here is that, according to Kant, the maxims of happiness are subjective and may be infinitely different and thus fail to be accepted as moral laws which have to be objectively valid. In fact, Kant tries to define a moral law of reason, which has the same universality and necessity as a mathematical proposition.²⁰⁸ By the help of these considerations, it can be argued that, Kant arrives at two main conclusions (or contentions): First of all, any principle which has with it a claim for one's well-being (i.e., happiness) cannot serve as a moral law. Because, according to him a law, which has to be valid for every rational being, cannot be produced by means of empirical knowledge. In line with this contention, Kant claims that as Epicurus' ethical principle is directed toward "one's own happiness" it cannot be deemed as a moral principle. Secondly,

²⁰⁷ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.37

²⁰⁸ For this similarity between mathematical propositions and the moral law, see for example, *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, p.19

moral law must be an a priori product of pure reason, i.e., it ought not to include anything empirical. In the previous chapter I have argued that Kant's contention that Epicurus' ethics is a self-love ethics is not true, and that Kant is not successful in giving an adequate explanation of a universal and necessary, (i.e., a priori) moral law of reason. I am now going to discuss these two arguments. I will discuss also, Kant's incorporating the concept of happiness into his theory of ethics. I will examine how this incorporation of the concept of happiness renders his system either inconsistent or an ethics aiming at happiness which thus loses much of its deontological vigor.

In the previous chapter, it has been stated that Kant makes a sheer distinction between morality and happiness and thus he seems to be suggesting a thoroughly *deontological* ethics. He contends that a moral action must be performed not because of its hoped-for-effect but only from *respect* to law, from *duty*. He gives a formula, which he calls as the *categorical imperative* for all moral actions: *Always act in such a way that, you could also will that the maxim of your action should become a universal law*. If an action is not performed from duty then, claims Kant, it is performed under the guidance of the faculty of desire, which means that the subject of the action has an inclination toward an object. In such a case, the action is only a means for a further end. Kant says that all inclination together comprises *self-regard*. This *self-regard* consists either of *self-love*, which according to him, is the ultimate goal of Epicurean ethics, or of *self-satisfaction*, which he says is the ultimate goal of Stoic ethics. He calls the first one *selfishness* and the second one *self-conceit*. Of course what is expected from moral law, in his view, is (by checking all sensuous impulses and inclinations) to eliminate selfishness and self-conceit from human conducts. Kant claims that “[p]ure practical reason merely checks selfishness, natural and active in us even prior to the moral law, is restricted by moral law to agreement with the law; when this is done, selfishness is called *rational self-love*.”²⁰⁹ Though this quotation is an accusation, which Kant directed toward Epicurean ethics, I argue that, it indeed depicts exactly what

²⁰⁹ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.76 (Emphasis is added)

Epicurus tries to do in his ethical system. In other words, I claim that Epicurus' ethics is not a "self-love ethics" (i.e., "selfishness") but a "rational-self-love" ethics. Moreover, I think that Kant commits a 'straw man fallacy' while assessing Epicurean ethics. That is, Kant criticizes some fictitious thoughts in the Epicurean ethical system which are indeed not held by Epicurus himself. For instance, when Epicurus says that pleasure is the beginning and the end of the life he just depicts what simply *is* but he does not mean by this that one ought to pursue pleasure (happiness) at all cost, which would obviously be selfishness. However, through his *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant depicts Epicurean ethics as self-love ethics or as selfishness. Kant, in the above quotation, himself emphasizes that selfishness [i.e., striving for the fulfillment of one's *desires*] is natural and active in us even prior to the moral law. In the same manner, Epicurus stresses this naturally predominant position of feelings of pleasure and pain. He just says that as natural (which at the same time are necessary) desires are a constituent part of human nature they must be fulfilled. For he thinks that, the fulfillment of natural desires is also a necessary condition for a tranquil life. Again, Kant gives a depiction of Epicurean philosophy as if it is aiming at happiness without any regard to virtue or justice. I think that such an interpretation of his ethics does injustice to Epicurus, for we have seen in the previous chapter that virtue, in his view, is a necessary and indispensable condition for a tranquil life. Epicurus maintains that virtue and happiness are the reciprocal conditions of each other. Of course, an Epicurean, in response, may accuse Kant for his separating morality from happiness and giving a picture of morality as if it has no relation with happiness. As we are going to see, Kant cannot dispense with happiness and incorporates happiness into his system of morality.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Epicurus tries to secure human freedom by introducing a spontaneous, undetermined '*swerve*' as a type of atomic motion. We have stated before that Epicurus is "arguably the first philosopher to recognize the

philosophical centrality of what we know as the Free Will Question.”²¹⁰ Why does Epicurus so zealously try to secure human freedom by introducing swerve as the third type of atomic motion? Why does he not simply accept that all things happen by necessity, as did Democritus? This point has crucial importance in understanding the philosophy of Epicurus, especially his ethics. If Epicurus were an advocate of only one’s own happiness, (i.e., in detriment of happiness of others), then it would be more convenient for his project simply to defend the deterministic atomist view of Democritus. In this fictitious case, his argumentation would have to be as follows: As (like every living being) man also seeks pleasure and abstain from pain, then endeavor for maximizing one’s own pleasure (even to the detriment of others’ interests) would not be blamable. However, Epicurus, by attributing free will to human beings, says man is not (and should not be) under the blind forces of (his/her) nature. Epicurus’ ethical system (i.e., virtue or justice) is, in a sense, the precept he proposes for the control of this what he calls blind forces of nature. Again, we know that Epicurus, on the one hand, says there is no afterlife, no punishments or rewards from gods, and on the other hand, tries to persuade us that human beings have free will. This means that human beings are responsible from the consequences of their actions, that is, they have to take into account the results of their choices and avoidances. In fact, it should not be so easy to blame such a philosopher as an advocate of selfishness, because even without the expectation of a future life or the gods’ wrath, Epicurus does not advise indulgence to any sort of pleasure. What he advises indeed is self-sufficiency, which can be accepted as a necessary logical consequence of an atomist freedom. He claims that, “[s]elf-sufficiency is the greatest of all wealth.”²¹¹ And it is due to this idea of *self-sufficiency* that he rejects all kinds of teleological explanations, or interventions of gods in human deeds. In his view, man can secure a life, which can be lived in tranquility, i.e., in *ataraxia* and for the attainment of this purpose man needs no providence of gods. As he thinks that there is no afterlife, he tries to secure the best life possible in this world. Lucretius, in his *De Rerum Natura*, says

²¹⁰ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, (a comment by Long and Sedley), p.107

²¹¹ *The Essential Epicurus*, (*Fragments*, n.70), p.99

that, “the fool’s life at length becomes a hell on earth”²¹² so it would not be an exaggeration to say that what Epicurus advises in his ethical theory is a heaven on the earth, and he thinks that the attainment of this earthly heaven is up to human beings.

How can man secure this earthly heaven, i.e., a tranquil life, which is freed of every kind of want and pain? First of all, man must have a true knowledge of the physical world so that he/she can dispel the anxieties which stem from the fear of death or punishments of gods in the afterlife. Secondly, one must have a true knowledge of his/her own nature in order to distinguish between natural (necessary and unnecessary) and vain desires and thus learn to satisfy the necessary ones and avoid the vain and unnecessary ones. He asserts that our false opinions about our desires would lead us to pointless competitive involvements with others and this in turn will cause anxieties. Epicurus says that, “[w]e must not resist nature but obey her. We shall obey her by fulfilling the necessary desires and the physical ones if they do not harm us, but harshly rejecting the harmful ones.”²¹³ This shows that Epicurus, too, wants a check on desires but not on the natural (and necessary) ones, only on those vain and unnecessary desires. Epicurus says that “*[s]o long as you do not break the laws or disturb proper and established conventions or distress any of your neighbours or ravage your body or squander the necessities of life, act upon your inclination in any way you like.*”²¹⁴ Though Epicurus does not reject any kind of pleasure categorically, yet he sets down conditions for the enjoyment of the pleasure depending on its kind and consequences. These conditions are others’ interests and one’s own health. As long as the enjoyment of a pleasure does not infringe one’s health, (i.e., it is not the cause of pain), and others’ rights, Epicurus does not find any problem with this enjoyment. This check over pleasures (desires), which is resulted indeed from a *heed* to interest of other,

²¹²*De Rerum Natura*, p.269

²¹³ *The Essential Epicurus*, (Vatican sayings, n.21), p.78

²¹⁴ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, p.116, (Epicurus, *Vatican sayings*, n.51) (Emphasis is added)

leads us to Epicurus' moral system. That is for the attainment of a tranquil life, besides above-mentioned two conditions, a third one is needed: One must be virtuous, that is one must act justly. In other words, in Epicurus' view, a system of justice (i.e., morality) is a necessary condition of a tranquil life. Now we are going to comment on some sayings of Epicurus, which we think are the pillars of his edifice of morality.

Epicurus says that “[t]he tranquil man is not troublesome to himself or to another.”²¹⁵ It can be argued that the word ‘another’ in this fragment implies all humanity, and that this principle of Epicurean ethics advises us not to infringe interest of others. Of course, this is obvious counter evidence to the accusations of selfishness. This means that though one naturally seeks pleasure, in the endeavor toward happiness one should not disregard others’ rights. We know that Kant’s main concern is to show moral law’s being a universal principle, which is valid for every rational being. I argue that, Epicurus, by virtue of the above dictum, is also tending to satisfy this universality. But here we encounter some problems which emerge from the concept of universality: Is there a concept of *good* which suits every rational being alike? Can this notion of *good* be known a priori, as Kant contends? Or is the concept of *good* a matter of agreement among people, as Epicurus contends? Of course as an empiricist philosopher Epicurus derives the concept of *good* from experience. According to him, one cannot know a-priori what the interests (*good* or *happiness*) of others are; to know them one must consult the others.

We have seen that Epicurus depicts the *ultimate good* for man as to live a life, which is free from all kind of bodily and mental disturbances. A tranquil life should be free from pain. Man, by nature, is a being of desires (or wants), which are to be satisfied continually. In a perfect life, all wants should be remedied in a secure way. I argue that in Epicurus’ point of view, there is only one way of remedying these wants, namely by virtue of a system of justice (virtue, morality).

²¹⁵ *The Essential Epicurus, (Vatican sayings, n.79), p.85. (Emphasis is added)*

Epicurus maintains that, “[w]hatever you can provide yourselves with the secure protection from men is a natural good.”²¹⁶ Certainly, this definition of natural good helps us very much to understand Epicurus’ moral philosophy. As I have argued before, this secure protection can be realized in three different possible ways. First of all, you can conceal your possession (i.e., right) from others i.e., you count on non-detection of a certain possession or a certain action. Secondly, you can count on your force (coercion) to prevent any claims that can be directed towards your possession. And thirdly, you can appeal to the consent of others for this possession. Others’ giving permission by their free will to your possession (i.e., your right) amounts to giving a pledge to refrain from all claims against your possession. I argue that Epicurus leaves out first two possibilities and sticks to the third possibility as the sole reasonable way of securing a right (possession). Now I will briefly explain my reasons I have found in Epicurus’ system that lead me to this conclusion.

The first possibility of providing something for oneself from secure protection of others, as I have said, can be an expectation of non-detection of any action (of course here what I mean by action is one that can be viewed by others as a crime, i.e., as an act that infringes others’ rights). Epicurus says that, “[y]ou ought to do nothing in your life that will make you afraid if it becomes known to your neighbor.”²¹⁷ What does Epicurus mean by this saying? Does he mean that one can commit a crime (i.e., infringe others rights) when he/she is sure that there is no possibility of the detection of this crime? Epicurus claims that we can never be sure of the non-detection of a crime:

It is impossible for the one who commits some act in secret violation of the compacts made among men not to do harm or to be harmed, to remain confident that he will escape notice, even if for the present he escapes

²¹⁶ *The Essential Epicurus, (Principal doctrines, n.6), p.70*

²¹⁷ *Ibid, (Vatican sayings, n.70), p.84*

detection a thousand times. *For right up to the day of his death, it remains unclear whether he will escape detection.*²¹⁸

Here we see that “right up to the day” of one’s death one cannot be sure that one’s crime “will escape detection.” And this uncertainty would always be the cause of anxiety which is nothing but an impediment to a tranquil life. This inner anxiety may be called by anachronistic terms *uneasiness of the conscience*. That is, Epicurus, in a sense, gives a materialist explanation of uneasiness of the conscience. This means that in Epicurus’ view, it is important that one should not count on non-detection. That is, even if there is no body around, one should obey the law and not infringe others rights. This explanation shows the priority of the obedience to law over self-interest. More precisely, self-interest is mediated by justice; one’s interest necessarily bound up with others’ interests. Of course, it follows from these considerations that it would not be so easy to accuse Epicurus as an advocate of selfishness.

The second possibility of providing a natural good from the secure protection of others is *force* (power or coercion) which can be imposed toward others who are, in a sense, victims of the committed crime. As Epicurus is blamed as an advocate of self-love ethics, he is normally expected to give countenance to the use of force (when one has enough force) in an expectation of personal (group) benefit. However, Epicurus contends that, “[i]t is impossible for the one who instills fear to remain free from fear.”²¹⁹ Here it is important that Epicurus does not speak of the size of the force. No matter how powerful one (or a group of people) may be he/she (they) cannot dispel the fear resulted from a possible counter assault. As according to Epicurus, fear is a menace to the attainment of a tranquil life, i.e., *ataraxia*, any one who would impose power on others, thus, will never acquire peace; neither external peace nor peace of mind.

²¹⁸ *The Essential Epicurus*, p.74 (Emphasis is added)

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.101

Thus, the sole way we are left with for providing a natural good from the secure protection of others is others' giving consent to our possessions (or actions). How and why do others give consent to our possessions or rights? This, I think, can be possible only when there is a perfect equality among people. In other words in a system of perfect justice, where laws are the words of common consent, any action which is in accordance with laws would provide *natural good* for every one. On the other hand, if there is at least one person who thinks that there is partiality in the society, he/she would not give consent to others' actions, which he/she thinks infringe his/her own rights. In this case, that one person will be a menace to the peace of the society, and consequently others cannot be free from anxiety. Therefore, I argue that, in Epicurus view, self-interest can procure *natural good* only on the condition of justice (virtue). Obviously, everybody is aiming at his/her own happiness, but according to Epicurus, this would be possible only when the others' claims for happiness are not ignored. It has been stated before that Epicurus finds it impossible to live happily without being virtuous and conversely finds it impossible to be virtuous without living happily.²²⁰ He maintains that "[t]he just man is the most free of perturbation, while unjust man is full of the greatest disturbance."²²¹ *In fact, this is nothing but an empirical exposition of the justification of an objective justice (i.e., law).* Epicurus tells us that the attainment of happiness is possible only by justice (virtue) and that this condition is valid for all men alike. From all these considerations, we can conclude that Kant's assessing Epicurus ethical system as "self-love" ethics or as "selfishness" is not true or rather it is a fallacy, namely a *straw man fallacy*. The following quotation will help us to understand the fallacy committed by Kant.

The material of the maxim can indeed remain but cannot be its condition, for then it would not be fit for a law. The mere form of a law, which limits its material, must be a condition for adding this material to the will but not presuppose the material as the condition of the will. Let the material content be, for example, my own happiness. If I attribute to this everyone, as in fact I attribute it to all finite beings, it can become an objective

²²⁰ *The Essential Epicurus, (Principal doctrines, n.5), p.70*

²²¹ *Ibid, (Principal doctrines, n.17), p.71*

practical law only if I include within it the happiness of the others. Therefore, the law that we should further the happiness of others arises not from the presupposition that this law is an object of everyone's choice but from the fact that the *form of universality, which reason requires as condition for giving to the maxim of self-love the objective validity of law*, is itself the determining ground of the will. Therefore not the object, i.e., happiness of others, was the determining ground of the pure will but rather it was the lawful form alone. *Through it I restrict my maxim, founded on inclination, by giving it the universality of a law*, thus making it conformable to pure practical reason. From this limitation alone, and not from the addition of any external drive, the concept of obligation arises to extend the maxim of self-love also to the happiness of others.²²²

In the above quotation Kant says that it is merely the *form of universality* which renders a maxim objectively valid. I have said that, Epicurus, too, demands without exception a strict obedience to law. In other words, his conception of law also has the form of universality. In his view, one's own happiness can be attainable only under the condition that happiness for others is also secured. No matter how Epicurus' words are, his ethics propounds happiness for all. The straw man fallacy which, I think, is committed by Kant, is as follows: Though Epicurus never propounds a morality, which is aiming at only one's own happiness without regarding to the rights (i.e., acting selfishly in detriment of others) of others, Kant constantly calls Epicurean ethics as selfishness. What Epicurus says is that, for every living being pleasure is *good* and therefore desirable, and pain is *bad* and these can be decided by feelings. In his view, one can only empirically know what is *good* or *bad* for him/her-self and the conception of *good* and *bad* may vary from person to person. Therefore, according to him, justice is nothing but to produce a *common good* from these *subjective* individual *goods*. That is, justice, in his point of view, is nothing but a bundle of principles which organizes all conducts in such a way that a tranquil life (a life in peace, *ataraxia*) would be possible for everyone alike. Desires (feeling or pleasure) naturally compel man toward selfishness, but reason tames this selfishness by means of justice (virtue) and turns it into what Kant calls *rational self-love*. Epicurus asserts that there is no such thing as justice-

²²² *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.35 (Emphasis is added)

in-itself; justice, he goes on to maintain, is a compact which is decided upon by (a group of) people for their mutual advantage.

Though I argue that Kant's accusing Epicurus' ethics as self-love-ethics does not do justice to Epicurus, yet some criticism which Kant directs toward the Epicurean ethics are understandable, such as Kant's claiming that experience can produce some principles, which are nothing but only generalizations and thus do not have apodictic certainty of moral laws. According to Kant, the universality and necessity of a moral law can be satisfied if and only if it is an a priori product of pure reason. And he goes on to contend that, all rational beings (including man), as a hallmark of their freedom, can legislate this moral law a-priori (that is, without any recourse to experience) as a product of pure reason.

I am now going to compare the above quoted saying of Epicurus with Kant's categorical imperative to understand one of the crucial differences between their ethical systems. As we recall, Epicurus says that, "[y]ou ought to do nothing in your life that will make you afraid if it becomes known to your neighbor."²²³ Here I take the *neighbor* as a representative of all humanity, i.e., *anybody* or the *other*. Reading it this way, I claim that this saying of Epicurus resembles very much the categorical imperative of Kant, in the sense that, both this saying and categorical imperative demand universal validity of any moral action whatsoever. Still, I should add that, there is a difference between these two propositions, which indeed reveals the core of the difference between the moral systems of both philosophers. Let us recall Kant's categorical imperative: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law."²²⁴ The difference is that, while in Epicurus' saying for the justification of the moral action the emphasis is on a possible *fear*, which may come from other people (if they have not already given consent to the action), in Kant's categorical imperative the

²²³ *The Essential Epicurus*, p.84

²²⁴ *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge edition of the works of Immanuel Kant*), p.57 (Emphasis is added)

emphasis is on the *volition* of the subject. In the first case, moral action has an *external* ground whereas in the second case it is *internally* decided, i.e., the subject itself decides. That is why Kant depicts the first case as heteronomy of the will and the second case (i.e., his case) as autonomy of the will.

According to Kant, a moral law, which is a sign of free will, should be free of all that which is empirical. In this regard, he sets a chasm between reason and sensations (feelings) and views that, which pertains to sensation (e.g., desire for happiness), as an outer effect with respect to reason. This conception of man, as senses on one side and reason on the other side, points to a chasm in Kant's moral system. He asserts that, maxims of happiness are thoroughly different from maxims of morality. We see him making such deontological claims as if a slightest claim for happiness (if it is the motive of the action) will mean heteronomy of the will. However, later he, too, says "it is unavoidable for human nature to wish for and seek happiness."²²⁵ In other words, Kant will have to bridge this chasm, which, I argue, he has illegitimately produced. It can be said that, what Epicurus accomplishes in one step, Kant tries to accomplish in two steps. However, as we will see, this costs him to lose the consistency of his system. Epicurus, on the other hand, says that every living being by nature seeks for pleasure (which is idealized by him as an ultimate good under the name of a *tranquil life, ataraxia*) and the sole way for the attainment of it is virtue.

As I have said before, Kant contends that for a moral law to be universal and necessary, (i.e., be valid for all rational beings) it must be derived a-priori from pure reason. Then Kant comes up with the task of explaining the following questions: from where does this moral law get its *goodness* and how can it be communicated with other rational beings? In other words, how can one be sure that what is subjectively good for him/her is also objectively good for every other rational being? Again, it is incumbent on Kant to account for the role of senses

²²⁵ *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p., 192

(feelings), and in this regard, to explain the meaning of the claims toward happiness. Are feelings all redundant or claims for happiness superfluous?

Kant contends that the concepts of *good* and *well-being*, i.e., pleasant are thoroughly different in kind. He says that which is *pleasant*, “influences the will solely through the medium of sensation as a result of purely subjective causes, effective only for the senses of this person or that, not as a principle of reason valid for everyone.”²²⁶ According to him, human beings belong, on the one hand, to the sensible world, and on the other hand, to the intelligible world. He thinks that the concept of *well-being* (which is formed by their different desires, different perceptions of pleasure or happiness) has different meanings for each unique man. In this respect, the sensible world can vary a great deal because of differences in sensibility among different observers, whereas the intelligible world always remains the same. Kant depicts this difference as follows:

[A]s far as mere perception and the capacity for receiving sensations are concerned, he[the subject, human being] must count himself as belonging to the world of sense, but as regards whatever pure activity there may be in him (whatever reaches consciousness directly and not by affecting the senses), he must count himself as belonging to the intellectual world.²²⁷

Kant says that if human beings were solely members of the intelligible world, then their all actions would conform perfectly to the principle of autonomy of a pure will; but if they were solely a part of the sensible world, their actions would conform completely to (the natural laws of) desires and inclinations, and thus to the heteronomy of nature. In the first case, they would rest on the supreme principle of morality, in the second case on the principle of happiness.²²⁸ He maintains that, “[i]n the doctrine of happiness empirical principles constitute the

²²⁶ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. A. Zweig), p.215

²²⁷ *Ibid*, p.251

²²⁸ *Ibid*, p.253

entire foundation, but in the doctrine of morality they do not form even the smallest part of it.”²²⁹

Here we see that Kant’s thought very much resembles that of Plato. As is known, for Plato sensible world, which undergoes a continuous change, is only a shadow of the real world of Ideas in which there is no change. In the like manner Kant now tries to persuade his readers that in the intelligible world, the concept of *good* (or evil) has the same meaning for all rational beings. According to Kant, any principle, which is mingled with something from experience or sensation, cannot be counted as a universally valid moral law. But we know that Kant rejects the rationalist claims about *innate ideas*. How, then, does a human being form the concepts of *the good* and the *evil* if not from experience? Kant is aware of this problem, which stands as a menace to his ideal system. Now, he has to prove that the concept of *good* and *evil* have nothing to do with experience; otherwise, he will come up with the solution of Epicurus. He calls the difficulty the *paradox of method* and gives following explanation:

*The paradox is that the concept of good and evil is not defined prior to the moral law, to which, it would seem, the former would have to serve as foundation; rather the concept of good and evil must be defined after and by means of the law. ...Assuming that we wished to begin with the concept of the good in order to drive the laws of the will from it, this concept of an object (as a good object) would designate this object as the sole determining ground of the will. But because this concept had no practical law a priori as its standard, the criterion of the good or evil could be placed only in the agreement of the object with our feeling of pleasure or displeasure, and the use of reason could only consist in part determining this pleasure or displeasure in connection with all sensations of our existence and in part in determining the means of providing ourselves with the object of these feelings. Now since, only through experience can we find out what is in accordance with the feeling of pleasure, and since by hypothesis the practical law is to be based on it, the possibility of a priori practical laws is excluded because it was thought necessary first of all to find an object for the will the concept of which, as a good object, would have to constitute the universal though empirical determining ground of the will.*²³⁰

²²⁹ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.96

²³⁰ *Ibid*, pp.65-6 (Stress is added)

This long explanation about empirical determination of the concept of good is in fact exactly in line with what Epicurus says on this issue. According to Epicurus, the goodness of pleasure and badness of pain has an empirical certainty, which needs no further demonstration. Because even when children have no sense of morality, they know by virtue of their feelings what the *good* and the *bad* are. But Kant rejects this Epicurean explanation and says it is not true that “the concept of the good as an object of the moral law determines the latter and makes it possible, but rather the reverse, i.e., that the moral law is that which first defines the concept of the good...and makes it possible.”²³¹ Knowing that Kant rejects the idea of intellectual intuition then if the moral law itself determines the concept of the good then how does the moral law become a direct motive of the will? In other words, what compels me to act in accordance with the moral law? Or I may paraphrase the question in Kant’s terms: Where from do I get the idea of *respect* for the moral law? Kant says that, “*how a law in itself can be the direct motive of the will (which is the essence of morality) is an insoluble problem for the human reason. It is identical with the problem of how a free will is possible*”²³² Thus I argue this is not a satisfactory explanation of allegedly a priori moral law of pure reason. Kant just evades the difficulty by claiming that it is an insoluble problem like the problem of freedom. We see that, in search of a transcendently ideal (i.e., prior to any experience) moral law, Kant tries to save the moral law from all kind of empirical ‘infections’. As I have stated in the previous chapter, he thinks that the roots of morality are not grounded in the interpersonal relations of human beings. Morality, in his view, is rooted in pure reason and the field of interpersonal relations can only be a passive recipient of the effect of the moral conduct. Certainly, Epicurus would respond to the above question as follows: It is the fear of (and/or the love toward) others, which impose(s) the (moral) law on me. And the law is not ideal and in-itself good but rather an agreement for mutual advantage of the parties. It

²³¹ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.66

²³² *Ibid*, p.75 (Emphasis is added)

follows from all these that, in Kant's view, even if there were only one rational being in the universe this rational being would still have to be a moral being. In fact, it can be said that this is nothing but his conception of the *Supreme Being*. In his view, virtue (or morality) *ipso facto* belongs to the nature of *Supreme Being*. Certainly, Kant would give no reason for this, as he would define this problem as insoluble. As I think that Hobbes is in line with Epicurus on the issue of justice, it would be helpful to recourse to Hobbes's words to understand the difference between Kant and Epicurus on this issue. Hobbes asserts that, "[j]ustice and injustice are neither faculties of the body or the mind. If they were, they would be in a man that is alone in the world, as are his senses and passions. Justice and injustice are qualities that related to men in society, not in solitude."²³³ Epicurus has the same line of argumentation when he says that there is no such thing as justice-in-itself and that justice is always a *compact*, which is held by people for not harming and being harmed. I may explain Kant's fear as follows: If my being a moral agent had anything to do with *other agent* (i.e., other's fear or love that leads me to the law), then the 'viruses' of empiricism would unavoidably infect the moral law. "Therefore," says Kant, "we shall not have to show a priori the source from which the moral law supplies a drive but rather what it effects (or better, must effect) in the mind, so far as it is a drive."²³⁴ In this way, Kant does not find it necessary to explain how a moral law can be a direct motive of the will. On the other hand, the effects of the moral law, Kant says, are feelings of pleasure and pain. He contends that these feelings (which he calls as moral feeling) are generated not by sensation, but by reason. In this way, he tries to show that reason, in a way, has a relation with feelings, but in such a manner that reason is not directed by feelings but rather the reverse is the case. Kant thinks that there must be a harmony between the intelligible world and the world of causality. By virtue of this explanation about the connection between reason and feelings, Kant, in a sense, tries to give an answer to a possible accusation of his treating feelings as redundant in his ethical system. Of course, this will also serve as a base for Kant to

²³³ *Leviathan*, p.84

²³⁴ *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp.75-6

explain the connection between morality and happiness. It is important to note here that, for Kant the feeling of pleasure (or happiness in general) ought not to be the determining ground (i.e., motive) of the moral action. Kant's treating pleasure is such that, it seems like a *not-intended-for* by-product of reason. As I have said before, according to Kant, whenever an object of the will is the determining ground of the will then we cannot talk about the autonomy of the will, but only about the heteronomy of the will. Kant contends that in the case of the heteronomy of the will, "[t]he will would not prescribe the law to itself, but an *alien* stimulus would do so through the medium of the subject's own nature which is attuned to receive it."²³⁵ Thus all kinds of desires, in Kant's view, are alien stimuli for the human being. Even, we see him repeatedly defining sensuous inclinations as pathological.²³⁶

For the sake of the argument, let us accept that reason can satisfactorily legislate a moral law without any recourse to experience. Yet there remains the problem of communication of this moral law with other rational agents. In other words, if the concept of *good* (and thus the law) is not agreed upon by a common decision of all people how, then, can I be certain that what I treat to be a universal and necessary law would perfectly suit other rational beings? We recall that Kant's categorical imperative says "[a]ct on a maxim which at the same time embodies in itself its own validity for every rational being."²³⁷ The problem is that; who will decide about this objective validity? Of course, it cannot be *others*, as this will mean empiricism. As each unique rational being has the capacity to realize the good, which holds for everybody, the rational agent needs not to consult to other rational beings while deciding what the good and the evil are. I argue that this ideal conception of morality (which is aiming at apodictic certainty) would inevitably culminate in a sheer subjectivism or solipsism. In Kant's point of view, if I

²³⁵ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. A. Zweig) p.244-5

²³⁶ See e.g., *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.78

²³⁷ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. A. Zweig), p.238

sincerely wish that the maxim of my action be a universal law then my action can be deemed as moral, even if it may produce bad consequences for someone. We know that Kant constantly emphasizes that a *moral law of reason is valid for all rational beings* and if the problem of physical impotency for the human being were excluded, then there would be no difference between the human being and God. In other words, according to Kant, moral laws hold for God and human beings alike, but in the case of God, there is no obligation as His subjective will necessarily is also an objective will. The obligation, i.e., duty (respect for law) is incumbent on human beings, as they are under the threat of perversion by desires. Kant thinks that he, by his ideal system (which, he says, is founded on the critique of Reason) has satisfactorily refuted rationalism and empiricism. He depicts the accomplishment of his critical system as follows: “Here we see philosophy placed in what is actually a precarious position that is supposed to be firm though it is neither suspended from heaven nor supported by the earth. Here she must show her purity as the sustainer of her own laws.”²³⁸ I argue that what Kant’s ethics intends to do with its insistence on the purity and the absolute necessity of laws is nothing but to represent the idea of God, this time with the allegedly pure laws of reason. If I put it in a different way, God now turns out to be replaced by the transcendental ideality of Reason. Every single Reason, (without needing something from experience), can legislate a priori (i.e., universal and necessary) law, which has apodictic certainty. This means that, Kant’s philosophy of morals needs not to be suspended from heaven; reason itself is now depicted as a representative of heaven, (or rather heaven itself). Kant maintains that, “the supreme condition of the will’s harmony with universal practical reason is the Idea of *the will of every rational being as a will that legislates universal law.*”²³⁹ We know that in the metaphysics of Leibniz, (which is labeled by Kant as dogmatic), there is a hierarchy of monads and the problem of communication is solved by the

²³⁸ *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, (trans. A. Zweig), p. 226

²³⁹ *Ibid*, p.232

idea of the pre-established harmony between monads.²⁴⁰ Here, in Kant, there is no hierarchy between rational beings (of course if we ignore the physical impotency of human beings, as Kant himself proposes us to do); they all are equal and have full authority to legislate a law which would be valid for all rational beings. Thus, there would be no problem of communication as there is a perfect harmony between them. As Kant does not accept any empirical content to moral law, he rejects the consent of others in the decision process of moral law. Though my action has consequences which somehow affect the *others*, I need not to consult others when I have a good will or I act with a good volition. The sole criterion is that whether I at the same time can wish that the maxim of my action be a universal law or not.

It is obvious that on the one hand Kant's reasoning can be accepted as a search for universalism but on the other hand, as he excludes others in the formation of the moral value (as this, in his view, would be empiricism), the result always has the possibility of ending up in a sheer dogmatism or despotism. If, for instance, a boy who kills his sister (who was verdict to death by a family court as a result of the accusation of adultery, a case which is not rare in some part of the contemporary world) *sincerely wishes that the maxim of his action be a universal law*, then this murder, in Kant's view, would be accepted as a moral action. One may object that such a maxim cannot be universalized hoping that someone will reject its being a universal law. But who will be the arbiter, or lawgiver? As Kant wants to leave out any possibility of an empiric contribution to the law, (which is indeed nothing but somehow the consent of others), he finds the *form* of law (as a *subjective volition* for maxims' being a universal law) as a sufficient condition for any action to be moral. We recall also Kant's saying that the consequence of the action has nothing to do with the morality. However, the consequence provides at least necessary information, which enables others to assess the action (though not sufficient for an adequate assessment). After all, how can one know (or be certain of) others'

²⁴⁰ See, *Leibniz* Section, in W.T.Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy, III. Hobbes to Hume*, USA, Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 1980, pp.224-9

principle (maxim) of volition? It would not be wrong to say that the consequence of an action is (at least in most cases) a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for a sound assessment of that action. And the principle of volition, though very important, cannot be thoroughly separated from the consequence of the action. Otherwise, there would be no option left other than to accept that everyone is the judge of his own conscience (i.e. a sheer subjectivism). But this would mean that, Kant's claim about the objectivity (objectivity in its ideal and perfect sense, which Kant contends his system of ethics has successfully accounted for) of the moral law fails. And it follows from all these that what Kant calls a priori *moral law* is nothing but a subjective principle of conduct, which one can legitimately impose *only* upon him/her-self. In fact, what Kant means by an alleged ideality (and thus universality and necessity) of moral law is typical of religious sects. What is accepted as law within this universal set of sect members is nothing but the precept of conduct legislated by the leader of the sect. The mystification of this legislation process, the aura around the personality of the leader, and the absolute willingness of the members of the sect to obey this precept is the source of this idealism and alleged universalism. The following quotation is a comment of Allen Wood on Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*:

The common picture of Kantian moral reasoning is one of agents fastidiously testing their maxims for universalizability and confining themselves to the straight and narrow path allowed them by strict and demanding set of duties. In contrast to this picture, The *Metaphysics of Morals* is anything but a system of unexceptionable rules dictating a single determinate action on each occasion and forbidding all others.²⁴¹

Though Wood does not share this view, (which, he says is the common picture of Kantian moral reasoning), this picture unfortunately is one of the logical consequences of Kant's enthusiastic endeavor to establish an a priori moral law which, he contends would have the rigor of a mathematical proposition. As is well known, no mathematical proposition allows exceptions. An idealist morality,

²⁴¹ Allen Wood, "The Final Form of Kant's Practical Philosophy", in *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals, Interpretative Essays*, ed. M. Timmons, Oxford, New York, Oxford Uni. Press, 2002, p.10

aiming to eradicate all that which is empirical, eventually in this or that way converges with dogmatism. In fact, Kant himself, too, realized the danger. We see him sometimes using a rather moderate language over the meaning of morality. He criticizes a moralist who concerns himself with small details and warns us that such strict precepts would lead to tyranny.

The true strength of virtue is a *tranquil mind* with a considered and firm resolution to put the law of virtue into practice. That is the state of *health* in moral life, whereas an affect, even one aroused by the thought of *what is good*, is a momentary, sparkling phenomenon that leaves one exhausted. But the man can be called fantastically virtuous who allows *nothing to be morally indifferent (adiaphora)* and strews all his steps with duties, as with man-traps; it is not indifferent to him whether I eat meat or fish, drink bear or wine, supposing that both agree with me. *Fantastic virtue is a concern with petty details ... which, were it admitted into the doctrine of virtue, would turn the government of virtue into tyranny.*²⁴²

Of course, the problem of communication of the moral law is not only a theoretical problem but one may wonder how this allegedly objective (i.e., universal and necessary) moral law is put into practice? Kant says that, “ethics does not give laws for *actions* but only for *maxims* of actions.”²⁴³ According to him, only “the concept of an *end* that is also a *duty*” can satisfy the condition to be a law for maxims of action. Kant’s contention is that, in this way, subjective ends are subordinated to this objective end. Now, in fact, this concept of the objective *end* is another sanctuary of objectivity for Kant to take refuge in. Kant does not solve the problem; he just pushes it toward another place. Then the question that must be posed now turns out to be that of who will be the subject (i.e., maker) of this objective *end*, i.e., who will define it? And of course how will it be defined? Obviously an objectivity, as a general agreement can be decided upon, (e.g., in the way Epicurus defines justice), but what is at issue here is the concept of objectivity in its Kantian sense, i.e., an ideal (universal and necessary) objectivity. After all, if this *end* provides a law for all subjects it must be concrete and be knowable by all

²⁴² *Metaphysics of Morals*, p., 209 (Emphasis is added to the last three rows)

²⁴³ *Ibid*, p.193

subjects. Kant above says that only “the concept of an *end* that is also a duty” provides a law for all maxims of actions. But as we are now going to see it is not such an easy task to give an account of this so-called “objective end which at the same time is a duty”.

Kant maintains that “[o]nly an end that is also a duty can be called a duty of virtue.”²⁴⁴ He goes on to contend that there are only two ends that can also be duties, and these are *one’s own perfection* and *happiness of others*.²⁴⁵ Thus, in Kant’s point of view, “one’s own perfection and the happiness of others” stand as moral laws for all maxims of action. It is interesting that Kant does not count “one’s own happiness” and “perfection of others” among the moral laws. He claims that,

[One’s] own happiness is an end that every man has (by virtue of the impulses of his nature), but this end can never without self-contradiction be regarded as duty. What everyone already wants unavoidably, of his own accord, does not come under the concept of *duty*, which is *constraint* to an end adopted reluctantly.²⁴⁶

What does Kant mean when he says everyone already wants unavoidably his own happiness? If desire for happiness, as an impulse, accompanies every moral action, how then can Kant’s moral law be deemed deontological? Again, if one’s own happiness is not a direct duty for oneself, why does happiness of others (and not the perfection of others) be a direct duty for oneself? Above, I have said that Kant’s endeavor for an ideal moral law brings with it the danger of a ‘tyranny of virtue.’ Presumably, to avoid this danger Kant rejects “perfection of others” to be a duty for oneself. Obviously, one must somehow communicate with others if solipsism is to be avoided. I think that, to realize this contact Kant introduces

²⁴⁴ *Metaphysics of Morals*, p.188

²⁴⁵ See Paul Guyer, “Kant’s System of Duties” in *Cogito Özel Sayı: Sonsuzluğun Sınırında Immanuel Kant*,

²⁴⁶ *Metaphysics of Morals*, p.190

‘happiness of others’ into the subject as an *end* and *duty* for oneself. Now for the sake of the argument, let us accept that there is no problem of objectivity related to the concept of “one’s own perfection”. After all, it needs not to be communicated with others; everyone can depict a picture of perfection in his/her own way. But what about the “*the happiness of others*” which stands before me both as an *end* and as a *duty*. How can I get the cognition of the happiness of others if not empirically? Kant himself says that all cognition of happiness can be obtained only through experience.²⁴⁷ In this regard, how can it be possible that promoting others’ happiness a-priori stands before me as an *end* and as a *duty*? Who will decide about its quiddity and the means for achievement of it? Is it he/she or I? If one decides and the other just accepts, this would be heteronomy of the will rather than autonomy of the will, which obviously would be contrary to Kantian conception of *free will*. Or else, is this *happiness of other* a matter of consensus between him/her and me? In this case, would not the concept of the end (or the moral law) be a product of empirical agreement, rather than being a priori? Kant explains the issue as follows:

When it comes to my promoting happiness as an end that is also a duty, this must therefore be the happiness of other men, whose (permitted) end I thus make my own end as well. It is for them to decide what they count as belonging to their happiness; but it is open to me to refuse them many things that they think will make them happy but that I do not, as long as they have no right to demand them from me as what is theirs.²⁴⁸

What we learn from this quotation is that the happiness of other is not in itself very clear and distinct in the sense that it causes no dispute between the parties. What is important for me is my conceiving the proper means for promoting other’s happiness. Then this *end*, (though depicted by Kant to serve as a universal and necessary moral law for my maxims of actions) is nothing but a relative, subjective principle described by oneself. In other words, the alleged objectivity of the end, which in turn will serve as a law for my maxims of action escapes from me as a

²⁴⁷ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 19-20

²⁴⁸ *Metaphysics of Morals*, p.192

rainbow does. Again, Kant himself says that maxims of happiness can be known only through experience, then how does happiness of others deserve to be a moral law for me? What follows from all these explanations, I argue, is that Kant's endeavor to give a thoroughly idealist (which has no empirical content) account of a priori (universal and necessary) law of morality is not successful.

As I have concluded that Kant's account of an ideally objective moral law has failed one may wonder whether he can establish this objectivity in the concept of the juridical (civil) law. Can Kant prove that a juridical law is a product of pure reason so that its objectivity borrows nothing from experience? It has been said that "Kant subsumes law and ethics under the more general category of morality, assigning both distinct spheres of moral competence."²⁴⁹ According to him, both juridical laws and moral laws are laws of freedom. In this regard, he contends that, juridical laws, too, are derived from the principles of pure reason. However, a juridical law is different from a moral maxim in that the former is externally enforceable while the latter is resting on a subjective motive. But does not this force of others imply an empirical contribution to juridical law? One can raise some other questions pertaining to juridical law: Since a law is a strict precept for doing or not doing certain actions, how does this law come to being if not by virtue of an agreement on the concept of *common good*? Is it the law which defines common good, or rather is it the *common good*, (i.e., a consensus of *individual goods*) which determines the law? Can we talk of a perfect identity of unique conceptions of *good*, which can eliminate all conflicts among people and thus enables all of them alike to accept the law as a product of their own free wills? In the case of the moral law, the problem is rather easy to solve; after all the 'value-maker' is the subject itself and there is no coercion, but a subjective motive to obey the principle. However, a juridical law must be concrete and external, and

²⁴⁹ Katrin Flikschuh, "Kantian Desires: Freedom of Choice and Action in the Rechtslehre", in *Kant's Metaphysics of Morals Interpretative Essays*, ed Mark Timmons, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002 p.194. Note: As Kant calls both ethical and juridical laws as moral laws, in the like manner, in this study, I, too, do not make any differentiation between them, and treat both kinds of laws as moral laws.

demands absolute obedience with the threat of punishment. Then we have to ask; who will be the legislator of the law? And how will this legislation process be undertaken?

As it has been stated before, Kant maintains that “[t]he legislative authority can be attributed only to the united Will of the people. Since all of justice ... is supposed to proceed from this authority, it can do absolutely no injustice to anyone.”²⁵⁰ As a law is a strict precept of doing or not doing something, Kant says, it has always with it the possibility of causing injustice. However, if this law is a product of the free will of the people then this coercion will be a self-imposed coercion and thus produces no injustice. He says that one of the “juridical attributes inseparably bound up with the nature of a citizen as such is that the lawful *freedom* to obey no law other than one to which he has given his consent.”²⁵¹ According to him, since with a general united will of the people “each decides the same for all and all decide the same for each” there will be no injustice, for, he says, “he who consents cannot be injured.” Obviously, what Kant here mentions as the general will implies unanimity of the opinions. But what if there is no unanimity of opinions? If there is no unanimity then it is obvious that those who vote against the majority vote would not be accepted as if they give consent to the law. In this regard, can they be regarded as obeying the law of their free will? If there is no unanimity for the accepted law, then how can we talk of ideal objectivity of the law? Again, does not this consent of others prove the empirical origin of all juridical laws? Kant does not give any answers to such questions in his *Rechtslehre*. But we know that Kant was very much influenced by Rousseau’s thought. In his *Social Contract* Rousseau says that citizens, by obeying general will (i.e., law), cannot be deemed as obeying an external will, as the general will is nothing but (a product of) their own will. They participate in (and thus give consent to) the formation of the general will. According to Rousseau, the majority vote determines the law and minority must obey this law. And he claims that those who oppose majority

²⁵⁰ *Metaphysical Elements of Justice*, p.119

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.120

opinion must accept that they have mistaken and their true opinion(s), in fact, should have been in line with majority opinion. I argue that Kant skips the process of the formation of the juridical law (which is clearly empirical) and thus cannot be deemed successful in giving an account of an ideally objective juridical law.

I have argued that as Kant thinks that the maxims of happiness can only be known empirically, and as experience can never produce a law which has objective validity (i.e., universal and necessary) he rigorously tries to set apart morality from happiness. His contention is that only in this way can an account of a priori moral law of reason successfully be given. According to him, any moral action must be performed from respect to law and not for its hoped-for-effect, and if any claim for happiness accompanies an action, then the action loses its all moral worth. In this regard, as I have said before, he seems to be purporting a sheerly deontological morality. But this is not the whole of the story. It is incumbent on Kant to give an explanation of man's having senses if they are not thoroughly redundant. Thus, he inevitably introduces happiness in his moral system. Kant says that, there is one purpose, which can be presupposed that all rational beings actually do have by a natural necessity: this purpose is happiness.²⁵² Of course, Kant's introducing happiness in his system has some important implications. At least his seemingly deontological moral system loses much from its vigor. And in this way his criticism against claims for happiness becomes weaker.

We recall that Kant makes a sheer distinction between maxims of virtue and maxims of happiness. Yet he maintains that, "this distinction of the principle of happiness from that of morality is not for this reason an opposition between them, and pure practical reason does not require that we should renounce the claims to happiness."²⁵³ Despite this explanation "[h]is dualistic presuppositions, ... usually

²⁵² *Ground of Metaphysics of Morals*, (in *Practical Philosophy, the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*), p.68

²⁵³ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.97

led him to make happiness the antithesis of virtue, not its correlate.”²⁵⁴ In this regard, for instance, despite Epicurus’ saying that virtue is the condition of happiness, Kant calls his ethics as self-love ethics for its setting happiness as the ultimate good for man. Nevertheless, Kant eventually introduces happiness in his system to bridge the chasm, which he has set between morality and happiness by saying that it is necessary to assume that the system of morality inseparably bound up with that of happiness.²⁵⁵ In the beginning of his exposition, in the endeavor of proving apriority of moral law (for which he has left out all claims for happiness, as, in his view, happiness can be known only empirically), he was saying that a moral action ought to be performed only because it is good-in-itself, whereas now his dictum turns out to be as ‘do that action through which you become *worthy to be happy*.’ Of course, this causes confusions about Kant’s moral system. T.M. Greene says that, “Kant’s introduction of happiness into this moral scheme is ... inconsistent with his own principles and is highly detrimental to them.”²⁵⁶ Again, Professor Sett Pringle-Pattison’s comment on Kant’s introducing happiness in his system is also revealing:

[T]he preacher of duty for duty’s sake, who had so rigorously purged his ethics of all considerations of happiness or natural inclination, surprises us with the baldly hedonistic lines on which he rounds off his theory. Job is not to serve God for naught after all... An unkind critic might say that although the primacy is accorded to virtue as the supreme condition, yet the definition of virtue as ‘worthiness to be happy’ seems, on the other hand, to put virtue in a merely instrumental relation toward happiness, as the real object of desire and the ultimate end of action.²⁵⁷

Though Kant tries to persuade his reader that his conception of happiness is thoroughly different from other accounts of happiness, this is, in the last analysis,

²⁵⁴ See Introduction by, Theodore M. Greene, Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Greene, La Salle, Open Court Pub. Co., 1960, p.lxiv

²⁵⁵ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.638

²⁵⁶ See “Introduction” by Theodore M. Greene in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p.lxii

²⁵⁷ Sett Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God in the Light of Recent Philosophy*, pp.32-3 quoted from *Introduction* by Theodore M. Greene and John R. Silber in Immanuel Kant’s *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p.lxiii

nothing but to accept the instrumentality of the morality. Kant contends that other philosophers, especially ancient Greek philosophers, mistakenly choose either happiness or virtue as highest good. Kant though emphasizes that *virtue is the unconditional condition of happiness*,²⁵⁸ he adds that this does not “imply that virtue is the entire and perfect good as the *object* of the faculty of desire of rational finite beings. For this, *happiness is also required...*”²⁵⁹ In other words, virtue and happiness together comprise the highest good (*Summum Bonum*). At this point, Kant’s system faces with two difficulties: He “introduces happiness into his account of *Summum Bonum* in such a way as to make it either superfluous, if the moral will is indeed autonomous, or if it is not, noxious and destructive to pure morality.”²⁶⁰ The concept of happiness seems to be redundant in his account, because Kant refuses to introduce it into the formation of the moral action, but then he says that happiness is a necessary (though not intended for) outcome of this moral action. On the other hand, if *Summum Bonum* is the object of moral action and happiness, as Kant now says, is a constituent part of this object, then Kant’s contention, which says moral law is an a priori product of reason, fails. For Kant himself maintains that maxims of happiness can be known only in an empirical way. However, Kant now says that happiness stands before me as a necessary element of the highest good. As he maintains that happiness is a constituent part of the *highest good* he now has to accept that happiness is good-in-itself which he previously refused vehemently.

Kant depicts the correlation between virtue and happiness in Epicurean philosophy as follows: “The Epicurean said: To be conscious of one’s maxims as leading to happiness is virtue.”²⁶¹ However, we have to notice that according to Epicurus virtue is a necessary condition for happiness as he emphasizes repeatedly that

²⁵⁸ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.116

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.116 (Emphasis is added)

²⁶⁰ See “Introduction” by T.M. Greene in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, p.lxiv

²⁶¹ *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp.117-8

without being virtuous one cannot attain happiness. I argue that what Epicurus means by a tranquil life, (so long as man lives in a society), can be understood (in Kant's terms) as follows: Virtue and happiness (pleasure, i.e., being free from every kind of pain) together comprise or rather depict itself the tranquil life. In fact, Kant, too, only with a different emphasis, says the same thing. As I have stated above, he is now saying 'do that action through which you become *worthy to be happy*.' What Epicurus says in a direct way, Kant says in an indirect and reluctant manner. Kant's line of argumentation is as follows: As a rational being, when performing a moral action I do not intend for happiness, and perform the action for its own sake (as it is good-in-itself). Yet happiness will be an unavoidably consequence of my moral action. But later Kant maintains that virtue and happiness together comprise the highest good (*Summum Bonum*) which he depicts as the object of a free will. One's "own happiness is an end that every man has by virtue of the impulses of his nature", in other "words everyone already wants" it "unavoidably."²⁶² As I have stated before this difference, in a sense, is a consequence of Epicurus' and Kant's respective conceptions of man. Epicurus as an atomist philosopher does not accept a body-soul (or feelings-reason) dualism. In his monist conception of man, sensation (feelings) and reason are not necessarily in conflict with each other. Kant, on the other hand, gives a portrayal of sensation and reason as if they stand as thesis and antithesis to each other. For instance, he asserts that, the maxims of virtue and the maxims of one's own happiness are "wholly heterogeneous and far removed from being at one in respect to their supreme practical principle; and even though they belong to a highest good, which they jointly make possible, they strongly limit and check each other in the same subject."²⁶³ In this regard, I argue that, Kant is in line with the traditional rationalist view that regards reason as something pertaining to divinity while despising senses (or body) as something pertaining to animality. One can see throughout his writing a tone of contempt toward sensation or feelings. He even calls what pertain to senses as pathological.

²⁶² *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p.190

²⁶³ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.119

Kant asserts that the ancient philosophers make another mistake by regarding the unity between virtue and happiness as analytic, i.e., regarding virtue and happiness to be the one and same thing (in accordance with the law of identity) which means that achieving one will automatically bring the other. He, on the other hand, contends that the unity between virtue and happiness is a synthetic unity and must be regarded not by law of identity but by law of causality.

Kant maintains that if the connection between virtue and happiness is accepted as being analytic then “the desire for happiness must be the motive to maxims of virtue,” if it is accepted as being synthetic then “the maxims of virtue must be the efficient cause of happiness.”²⁶⁴ According to him, the first proposition is absolutely false but the second one is not absolutely false (it is false only if we think that happiness is attainable in the world of senses, a mistake, which, he contends, is committed by the Stoics). Kant says that we are justified to think that there is a necessary relation between virtue as cause and happiness as an effect. But he contends that, “this relation is indirect, mediated by an intelligible Author of nature. This combination, however, can occur only contingently in a system of nature which is merely the object of the senses and as such not sufficient to the highest good.”²⁶⁵ Kant criticizes ancient and modern philosophers for thinking that “happiness in the very just proportion to virtue in this life” is possible.²⁶⁶ According to him, the possibility of this connection between virtue and happiness “belongs wholly to the supersensible relations of things and cannot be given under the laws of the world of sense, even though ... the actions which are devoted to realizing the highest good do belong to this world.”²⁶⁷ Kant contends that in the realization of the highest good something “is immediately in our power” but there

²⁶⁴ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.120

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.121

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.122

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, pp.125-6

is still something which “is beyond our power but which reason holds out to us as the supplement of our impotence” in the realization of the possibility of the highest good.²⁶⁸ In this way, Kant tries to persuade us that in this world and without the help of a Supreme Being the attainment of the highest good is impossible. He says that for the attainment of the highest good a complete fit of dispositions to moral law (i.e., virtue) is a necessity. But he contends that, “the perfect fit of the will to moral law is holiness, which is a perfection of which no rational being in the world of sense is at any time capable.”²⁶⁹ According to Kant, this perfect fitness, i.e., holiness, (which is required as practically necessary) can be reached only in an *endless* progress towards it; therefore, “on principles of pure practical reason, it is necessary to assume such a practical progress as the real object of our free will.”²⁷⁰ In this way, Kant arrives at the conclusion that the postulation of *the immortality of the soul* is a necessary condition of necessary object (i.e., the highest good) of a will, which is determined by the moral law.

Kant maintains that without the supposition of this infinite progress the moral law is completely degraded from its holiness, by being made out as lenient (indulgent) and thus compliant to our convenience. Although Kant says that holiness or a blessed life can never be achieved by any finite rational being, he goes on to maintain that one can nevertheless have a “prospect of a blessed future. For “blessed” is the word which reason uses to designate perfect well-being independent of all contingent causes in the world. Like holiness, it is an Idea which can be contained only in an infinite progress.”²⁷¹ But I argue that Kant’s postulating immortality of the soul for the achievement of a complete virtue is detriment to morality. If for a “complete fit of dispositions to moral law”, the infinite progress is required then every one necessarily will achieve this perfect fit which means that there will be no difference between moral and amoral actions as

²⁶⁸ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.126

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp.128-9

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pp.128-9

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.130 (footnote)

in the long run every unique human being will achieve this perfectness. You cannot blame anyone for his/her amoral actions (no matter how evil they are) as he/se would respond you that in an infinite time span he/she would compensate it.

Kant says that as we are not the cause of the nature, (among which there are human desires or feelings), we cannot bring nature “into perfect harmony with” our “practical principles.” Kant contends that for this perfect harmony it is also necessary to postulate the existence of a cause of all nature, which is itself distinct from nature. This cause, which “contains the ground of the exact coincidence of happiness with morality,” is obviously God.²⁷² Kant says that Epicurus commits a mistake by thinking that human free will is the sole and self-sufficient ground of the possibility of the highest good and that for this purpose there would be no need for any divine assistance. Kant criticizes the Epicureans as follows:

The Epicureans had indeed raised a wholly false principle of morality, i.e., that of happiness, into a supreme one, and for law had substituted a maxim of free choice of each according to his inclination. But they proceeded consistently enough, in that they degraded their highest good in proportion to the baseness of their principle and expected no greater happiness than that which could be attained through human prudence (wherein both temperance and the moderation of inclinations belong), though everyone knows prudence to be scarce enough and to produce diverse results according to circumstances, not to mention the exceptions which their maxims continually had to admit and which made them worthless as laws.²⁷³

Kant criticizes Epicureans for having moral maxims, which continually admit exceptions, as though he himself has given an account of a moral law, which is objectively valid, i.e., admits no exceptions. However, I argue, that Kant does not succeed in giving such an objective law. Moreover, Kant contemns Epicurus for not expecting a “happiness no greater than which could be attained through human prudence.” It is interesting that Kant, who arduously tries not to attribute any importance to the consequence of the moral action, now blames Epicurus for being

²⁷² *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.131

²⁷³ *Ibid*, p.133

satisfied with a modest *end*. According to Kant, the genuine happiness is Christian holiness. And he goes on to contend that Christianity, with its concept of the Kingdom of God provides a “sufficient” concept of the highest good, and that through the concept of the highest good as the ultimate goal of pure practical reason, “the moral law leads to religion. Religion,” he asserts, “is the recognition of all duties as divine commands...”²⁷⁴ Kant says that morality is not “the doctrine of how to make ourselves happy but of how we are to be worthy of happiness. Only if religion is added to it can the hope arise of someday participating in happiness in proportion as we endeavored not to be unworthy of it.”²⁷⁵ Thus, Kant’s morality that begins with the moral law of a free will culminates in religion, where principles, without any criticism, are generally accepted as dogmas. It is important to mention here that, a genuine comparison between Epicurus’ and Kant’s ethical systems can properly be made only after we take Kant’s introducing religion into his system of morality into account. Allen Wood’s depiction of this shift in Kant’s moral system is revealing:

This turn in Kant’s thinking may come to us as a surprise and even a shock. Kantian ethics is supposed to be a theory of autonomy, a theory that encourages human beings to govern their own lives through reason and think for themselves. Yet here he seems to be opting for *Schwärmerei* over critique, theological morality over rational morality, moral passivity over moral autonomy. Kant seems to be endorsing the Christian (and the specifically Pauline, Augustinian and Lutheran) doctrine that the true morality is one that regards human agency as morally impotent unless assisted by divine grace. Our aim should not be human morality or endless progress but superhuman holiness; moral ideals that depend on our natural powers are misguided and even corrupt; and we are in a state of total depravity unless we are given help from above.²⁷⁶

I have said that both Epicurus and Kant found their moral systems on the concepts of freedom and of self-sufficiency (autonomy of the will for Kant) of human beings. However, here we see that Kant’s puritan faith causes him to be unfaithful

²⁷⁴ *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.136

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p.136

²⁷⁶ Allen W. Wood, “Kant’s History of Ethics”, <http://www.historyofethics.org/062005Wood.shtml> (04.09.2010)

to the logical consequences of his ethical system. He despises Epicurus for expecting a happiness, which is achievable thorough human prudence. Of course, if Epicurus had defined happiness as for example something like Christian holiness, (which, Kant says, is a perfect happiness worthy of God), then he would have been in need of a divine assistance for the attainment of this holiness and thus the existence of God as a subjective necessity would have been proved. (I think this, at least, is Kant's expectation). In fact, it would not be wrong to say that Kant uses his system of morality as a means to prove the need for God, and thus, to justify the need for religion. Obviously, Epicurus would have responded to Kant's contempt, by accusing him as having delusions, and then under the weight of these self-produced delusions despising all that, which pertains to human beings. Kant accuses Epicurus for rendering morality a means for happiness; surely, Epicurus, on the other hand, would have accused Kant for rendering the life itself a means for a principle; a principle which is nothing but an alienation from real life. In fact, what is important for Epicurus is that life should be lived in its full perfectness; all philosophy, prudence, in short all principles, should serve for the attainment of this perfect life. And no principle can be deemed as good in-itself. All virtue (or justice) is a product of society, in other words, it means nothing for a man in solitude. To accept that these principles are products of society certainly means that they can be changed with time and place, and that these principles should be decided by a consensus of people to satisfy mutual advantage of all parties. However, to view such principles as eternal and a priori (and even as divine commands) would mean that it is unnecessary to consult others to decide the proper laws of action and thus open the gate for every kind of dogmatism. I argue that "[r]ecognition of all duties as divine commands" would lead Kant to accept one of the two possibilities. He has to accept either heteronomy of the will (i.e., I accept this duty because it is a command of divinity) or self-conceit (i.e., I can legislate a law which would be valid for all rational beings, thus I equate myself with divinity). As Kant, in his writings, refuses both of these alternatives then I argue that there should be an inconsistency in his ethical system.

5. CONCLUSION

As I have stated before both Epicurus and Kant are system philosophers. They try to give a full account of the human life, of the physical world and of course of 'metaphysical world'. But it would not be wrong to say that the priority of these philosophers, if I say it in Kant's terms, is "practical philosophy", though Kant's accomplishment in Epistemology is accepted as one of the important breakthroughs in the history of philosophy. I argue that their main endeavor is to give an account of objectivity of the ethics against skepticism.

In this Study, I have tried to compare the empiricist (atomist) ethical system of Epicurus with the idealist ethical system of Kant. Especially in his *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant defines the Epicurean ethics as a "self-love ethics" or "selfishness" and contends that it is an unsatisfactory in producing an objective law of morality. Main argument of this thesis is the defense of the Epicurean ethics against the claims raised by Kant. As an atomist philosopher, Epicurus rejects all kind of teleological explanations. In his view, there can be no vocation of man; a tranquil life, (i.e., *ataraxia*), a state which is free from all kind of bodily and mental disturbances is itself the ultimate goal of life. In other word, life must be lived in a perfect sense. Epicurus contends that this needs no further confirmation, as every living being from birth on seeks *pleasure* and abstains from *pain*. It is important to note that what Epicurus means by pleasure is the absence of pain. According to Epicurus man is self-sufficient for the attainment of this goal. His introducing 'swerve' as a spontaneous atomic motion into his system, to show that man has free will and thus is not totally under the control of the "*blind forces of nature*" is consistent with his conception of self-sufficiency of man. In other words, Epicurus maintains that, it is up to human beings to attain a perfect life, happiness. But how can man secure a tranquil life? As attainment of pleasure is possible only when every kind of pain is removed from life; man should in the first place, learn the ways of removing pain. In this regard, Epicurus says that, to dispel vain fears such as fear of death, or fear from gods, a firm knowledge of physical

world is needed. Again he differentiates between natural and vain desires and says that of natural desires some are necessary and others unnecessary. He claims that man's endeavor for vain and unnecessary desires is another source of troubles which stands as a threat for a tranquil life. Thirdly, there are *others* who stand there as possible shareholders of every kind of the materials of subsistence, and thus may become a menace for me. The Epicurean morality is nothing but an instrument of avoiding the danger which may come from other people, and thus satisfy a state of peace. Epicurus depicts *natural good* as something, which can be possessed with the secure protection from others and maintains that for this secure protection, one cannot count on non-detection or power as these would inevitably cause anxiety of mind and thus, be impediments for a tranquil life. I argue that, in Epicurus view, the only possible way of possessing something (i.e., performing an action) is getting the consent of others by their free wills. Of course, the main condition of this consent is the acceptance of a perfect equality of all men. In this way emerges a system of justice and all virtue. In this system, as the foundation of all rights is a general consent (or agreement), any slightest injustice or partiality, would threaten peace in the society, (and thus of course, peace of mind of each unique member of the society). Thus, according to Epicurus, justice or virtue is a product of the society and it can change with time and place. This means that, law is nothing but a common good, which is produced empirically. Obedience to law is unconditional, i.e., the enjoyment of any pleasure is permitted if and only if it does not break the laws. But according to Epicurus no pleasure is *per se* bad; as long as it's enjoyment does not infringe others' right and one's own health, it can be enjoyed. In this way, the happiness of any one is necessarily bound up with the happiness of others. Therefore, I argue that Kant's assessment of the Epicurean ethics as a self-love ethic or as selfishness is not a correct assessment. The Epicurean ethics rather necessitates happiness for all. As law is a word of common good and serves for mutual advantage of all parties, it is, in this sense, universal and necessary for every one participates in the formation of law and thus gives his/her consent to it. No one, under no condition, is permitted to break the law for the prospect of his/her own advantage. Of course, at the base there is one's own

happiness, i.e., every one necessarily seeks for his/her own happiness, but Epicurus says that virtue is the necessary condition of this happiness. It can be said that, Epicurus starts with pleasure and tries to persuade his reader that to be virtuous or to build a system of justice is good and indispensable for each and all people.

Kant, on the other hand, contends that for a law to be objectively valid it must hold for every rational being, i.e., be universal and necessary. But, he maintains that (as he, thinks he has already proved it in his *Critique of Theoretical Reason*) experience can never produce a universal and necessary law. According to him, for a law to be universal and necessary it must be a priori product of pure reason. He says that, as any principle, which has happiness as its object can only be known empirically it can never be objectively valid for every rational being. In this regard, he contends that the Epicurean ethics, which treats happiness as ultimate goal of life, cannot produce any objective moral law and indeed must be viewed as a self-love ethics. Kant says that the worth of a moral law does not come from its-hoped-for effect; it is good in itself, for he thinks that, “the value of any object that is to be acquired by our action is always conditional.” And of course, that which is conditional does not deserve to be the highest good. He asserts that an action if it is to be deemed moral, must be performed from *respect* to moral law, i.e., from *duty*, but not for its hoped-for consequence. Kant says that all claims about happiness are rooted in sensation and to get a moral law of pure reason, all that which pertains to senses must be eradicated from the concept of the moral law. He, thus, sets apart morality from happiness as if they stand as thesis and antithesis of each other. Kant claims that for an action to be absolutely good, it must be performed in accordance with a principle what he calls *categorical imperative*. This imperative says that, “I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.” According to Kant it is not the concept of the good which determines the moral law (which is the case in Epicurean ethics), but rather the moral law itself determines the concept of good. But, then Kant has to explain how does a moral law itself be a direct motive of the will? If I do not

know the concept of good prior to moral law, then how can I know that moral law is good, in other words, what compels me to obey moral law? Kant says that this is an insoluble problem. Thus Kant's contention is that, without any recourse to experience every unique rational being can know (or legislate) a law which has validity for all rational beings. Now there arises the problem of communication of this allegedly universal law. How can I be certain that what is good for me, is also good for others as I have already excluded others in the formation process of the law, (as this would defect the purity of moral law)? How is this moral law put in practice, if it ever can be?

Kant maintains that morality does not give laws for action but for maxims of action. And he goes on to contend that, an *end* that can also be a *duty*, deserves to be a moral law. He contends that there are only two such laws, namely, *one's own perfection* and *happiness of others* and that all maxims of action, if they are to be moral, must be performed in accordance with these moral laws. To solve the problem of communication Kant has to introduce *others* in this law, but on the other hand, to evade the danger of despotism he does not accept *perfection of others*, but rather *happiness of others* as a moral law. But this time there arises another problem. How can I know *happiness of others* if not from experience? Who will decide the quiddity of the *happiness of others*? Will it be a matter of consensus or rather one side will decide and the other side just accepts the decision? Then obviously, this moral law loses its alleged purity and thus, it can be argued that, Kant is not successful in deducing an a priori moral law of pure reason.

Kant cannot dispense with happiness and finally introduces it into his system by saying that happiness is the *purpose*, which can be "presupposed that all rational beings *actually* do have by a *natural necessity*." Though before he was saying that any action, if it is to be deemed as moral, must be performed from respect to law but not for the prospect of its consequence, now he says that, *do that action through which you become worthy to be happy*. With this shift in his stance, the

accusation, which he previously directed to Epicurus for rendering morality a means for happiness, now, can be directed to him. But Kant thinks that, his conception of happiness and of highest good is different from that of other philosophers. He contends that though virtue is the unconditional condition of the happiness, it cannot be deemed as the highest good (*Summum Bonum*). He goes on to maintain that for the concept of highest good happiness is also needed, that is, virtue and happiness together constitute the highest good. Kant asserts that perfect virtue can be achievable only by an endless progress towards it, and that in the realization of the highest good something “is immediately in our power” but there is still something, which is beyond our power, (as we are not the cause of the nature we cannot bring nature in perfect harmony with the laws of freedom), and for this we need a divine assistance. In this way, he says that the postulation of the immortality of the soul and of God stands as a subjective necessity for all finite rational beings. According to Kant, Christian *holiness* is a genuine model of the highest good. He contends that through this concept of the highest good as the ultimate goal of pure practical reason, the moral law leads to religion. And he depicts religion as “the recognition of all duties as divine commands”. In this way, Kant, who starts with the autonomy of the free will terminates in religion.

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