

KANT ON THE ETHICAL COMMUNITY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

by

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HAPPINESS

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to refute the formalist interpretation of Kant's ethics according to which all that it takes to be virtuous is to do one's duty for the sake of duty with no regard to one's happiness. In contrary, this thesis claims that for Kant, we have a duty to promote general happiness and its distribution in proportion to virtue—"the highest good". In other words, we should adopt a beneficent will and promote the happiness of all. To be able to perform this command of morality, Kant thinks that we need to establish an ethical community. This is because a morally corrupt community feeds our desire to affirm our superiority over others making us too preoccupied with distinctions in terms of wealth, knowledge and status to recognize the importance of and our capacity for virtue. A further argument of this thesis is that the ethical community has a religious nature and appeals to our need for the possibility of God's existence as well as to the morally useful psychologically compelling effect of belief in God. Kant thinks that by uniting in such an "ethical community", we can create a moral kingdom (a kingdom of ends) in which the pursuit of one member's happiness harmonizes with and advances the pursuit of another member's happiness.

## ÖZET

### KANT FELSEFESİNDE AHLAKİ CEMAAT VE MUTLULUK

ONUR FEVZİ MÜFTÜĞİL, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2006

Yard. Doç. Dr. Nedim Nomer

Anahtar sözcükler: Kant, amaçlar krallığı, en yüksek iyilik, Tanrı, ahlaki cemaat

Bu tezin amacı Kant ahlakının formalist(içeriksiz) yorumunu çürütmektir. Kant ahlakının formalist(içeriksiz) yorumuna göre erdemli olmak için tek yapmamız gereken görevimizi mutluluğumuzu düşünmeksizin sadece görev bilinci ile yerine getirmektir. Bu tez bu yoruma şu şekilde karşı çıkmaktadır. Kant'a göre erdemli olmak için aynı zamanda herkesin mutlu olabileceği bir durumu yaratmak ve bu genel mutluluktan hak ettiğimiz payı almak, yani "en yüksek iyiliği" oluşturmak gerekmektedir. Ne kadar hak ettiğimiz ise erdemliliğimiz ile doğru orantılıdır. Bu tezde savunulan bir diğer sav da Kant'a göre bu ahlaki gerekliliği yerine getirmek için "ahlaki bir cemaat" kurmamızın bir şart olduğudur. Çünkü ahlaken yoz bir cemaat başkalarına üstünlük taslama arzumuzu körükleyerek bizi erdemli olabilme yetimizden ve erdemın öneminden uzaklaştırmakta ve kafamızı daha çok zenginlik, statü ve bilgi temelindeki toplumsal farklılıklar ile meşgul etmektedir. Bununla beraber, Kant'a göre ahlaki bir cemaat aynı zamanda dini bir cemaattir ve bizim Tanrı'nın varlığının mümkün olması fikrine ihtiyacımıza ve psikolojimizde yaptığı etki ile bizi erdemli olmaya yönlendiren Tanrı inancına hitap etmektedir. Kant'a göre böyle bir cemaat oluşturarak, bir bireyin mutlu olma çabasının bir diğerinin mutlu olma çabası ile uyum içinde olduğu ve o çabanın gelişimine ve başarısına yardımcı olduğu ahlaki bir alan("bir amaçlar krallığı") yaratabiliriz.

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## CHAPTER 1:

### INTRODUCTION

Kant's ethical theory is frequently portrayed as an empty formalism. It is generally thought that according to Kant morality is formal observance of the moral law- simply doing one's duty for the sake of duty. In this view, Kantian ethics is regarded as oblivious to human fulfillment (happiness) and perfection<sup>1</sup>. This is a great injustice to the richness of Kant's ethics which is unquestionably concerned with how a happy and (morally) perfect humanity can be brought about.

The first step in my critique of the formalist interpretation of Kant is to see the relationship between Kant's different formulations of the moral law. Kant discusses three formulations:

- (1) "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Ak 4:421)
- (2) "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means" (Ak 4:429)
- (3) "A rational being belongs to the "kingdom of ends" as a member when he legislates in it universal laws while also being himself subject to these laws"(Ak 4:433)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an example of this classical approach, see J.B. Schneewind, "Autonomy, Obligation and Virtue: An Overview of Kant's Moral Philosophy," in Paul Guyer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p 309-41

<sup>2</sup> Throughout, I used the pagination of the Akademie Edition which is abbreviated as AK: Akademie der wissenschaften (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1902-) For Critique of Pure Reason, I did not use the Akademie Edition. Citations to this work use the abbreviation KA and KB: Critique of Pure Reason Part A and Critique of Pure Reason Part B. Please see the footnotes and the bibliography for the English translations I used for Kant's works.



It is clear from the second formulation (2) that Kant sees moral action to be directly connected with the promotion of an *end* (a purpose) Moral action has to promote the end of humanity. Humanity should always be treated as an absolute end and never as means. When we refuse to regard someone merely as a means to the satisfaction of our desires and interests, we are recognizing the humanity in him and promoting the end of humanity.

The “kingdom of ends” in the third formulation (3) means a kingdom in which all rational beings pursue their ends in harmony. It is “a whole of all ends in systematic connection” (Ak 433) In other words, the ends pursued by the members of the kingdom of ends harmonize with each other. This is because only the ends whose pursuit is morally permissible can be pursued in the kingdom of ends. The end of humanity (2) is the primary end that we should pursue in the kingdom of ends. That is, once again, we should always treat humanity in others and ourselves as an end in itself and never merely as means.

And the first formulation (1) tells us which other ends can be morally pursued in the kingdom of ends. We should be able to will that the ends we pursue are pursuable by all rational beings. Thus, we should act on the maxims that can become universal laws (laws for all rational beings)<sup>3</sup>. The ends commanded by maxims that cannot be universalized have no place in the “kingdom of ends”.

If my interpretation is correct, then the “kingdom of ends”, though it is a hypothetical concept<sup>4</sup>, becomes a central concept in Kant’s moral thought. It both includes both the pursuit of the end of humanity (2) and the principle of the universalizability of maxims (1), a principle that tells us which other ends can be pursued in the “kingdom of ends”.

Now, in the “kingdom of ends” there are certain ends the pursuit of which is a duty- what Kant calls a “duty of virtue” (Ak 6:383). These ends are “one’s own perfection” (Ak 6:387) and the “happiness of others” (Ak 6:388) The duty to strive for one’s own perfection consists in “cultivating one’s *faculties*... the highest

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<sup>3</sup> A maxim is a subjective principle of action. As we always act in order to attain certain ends, a maxim always states an end of action. When we act on maxims that can become universal laws we ensure that the ends we pursue can be pursued by other rational beings.

<sup>4</sup> No such kingdom really exists in the world.

of which is *understanding*... [and] cultivation of one's *will*(moral cast of mind)" (Ak 6:387) Duty to make the happiness of others one's end is to contribute to their happiness by helping them realize their ends. Kant notes, however, that "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"(Ak 6:388) A further note is that in carrying out the duty to make the happiness of others one's end, Kant allows only for the morally permissible pursuit of happiness(Ak 4:405) This is not surprising because the duty to make the happiness of others one's end is itself a command of morality. Morality would be in contradiction with itself if it had allowed for a morally unacceptable promotion of the happiness of others.

It is very clear that Kantian ethics is primarily concerned with human perfection and happiness<sup>5</sup>. These are two ends to pursue which is a duty incumbent upon the members of the "kingdom of ends". The duty to promote the happiness of other people<sup>6</sup> requires "an unselfish will which extends itself beyond the formal observance of the formal law to the production of an object (highest good)" (KA 279-80) The highest good is morally permissible happiness of all. It is "universal happiness proportioned to universal virtue" (Ak129) It is a state in which happiness is distributed according to virtue. In the highest good, therefore, the ends of (moral) perfection and general happiness are simultaneously realized. To achieve this state is the object of morality. According to Kant, in other words, morality goes "beyond the formal observance of the formal law" and aims at bringing about the general happiness. The moral realm (the kingdom of ends) is, therefore, a necessary condition of the highest good. In fact, Kant sometimes *identifies* the moral realm with the highest good(KA 809, KB837) This further establishes that formalism is not an accurate description of Kant's ethical thought and that for Kant morality is closely connected with the establishment and proper distribution of general happiness.

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<sup>5</sup> The following interpretations of Kant's moral thought are informed about this. See Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1999), Roger J. Sullivan, *An Introduction to Kant's Ethics*( Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1994), Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1996), Philip Stratton-Lake, *Kant, Duty and Moral Worth, Routledge Studies in Ethics and Moral Theory*(Routledge: London,2000)

<sup>6</sup> Promoting one's own happiness cannot be a duty because it is a natural inclination.

One other misportrait of Kant's ethics is to underestimate its religious backbone<sup>7</sup>. This stems from a lack of emphasis on Kant's work, "Religion Within the Boundaries of Pure Reason". In this work, Kant implies that the "kingdom of ends" finds its concrete manifestation "in the founding of a Kingdom of God on earth"(Ak 6:95)

Kant is very clear that possibility of the highest good (general happiness in proportion to virtue) requires the postulate of the existence of God. Kant puts this in the following way:

"In the moral law, there is not the least ground for a necessary connection between virtue and the happiness proportionate to it... But since we should seek to advance the highest good (which must therefore also be possible) we must postulate a ground of this connection. The highest good in the world is only possible insofar as a supreme cause of nature is assumed, which has causality appropriate to a moral disposition and which can only be God. Consequently the postulate of the possibility of the highest derived good(the best world) is at the same time the postulate of the actuality of a highest original good, namely the existence of God... the possibility of the highest good... occurs only under the condition of the existence of God"(Ak 5:124-25)

Only God can connect virtue and happiness proportionate to it (which are not connected through the moral law) by meddling in human affairs and assigning happiness according to virtue. We must, therefore, postulate the existence of God to be able to promote the highest good: "since we should seek to advance the highest good (which must therefore also be possible) we must postulate the ground of the connection between virtue and happiness in proportion to virtue" (AK 5:124-125).

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<sup>7</sup> Kant's claim that as a postulate of practical reason God is necessary for a complete system of morality is generally recognized. Still, as Allen Wood accurately observes, the basic misinterpretation to treat religion as incidental to Kant's rational morality persists.(See Allen Wood, "Religion, Ethical Community and the Struggle Against Evil", unpublished essay available online at <http://www.stanford.edu/~allenw/webpapers/EthicalCommunity.doc> ,pp3) Christine Korsgaard, for example, says that, "Faith springs from a need of the moral disposition and as such is voluntary. Salvation depends on moral character, not on what one believes". I will argue that what one believes is not as insignificant as Korsgaard takes it to be. The psychologically compelling force of belief makes us adhere to the moral law strongly.

We can now see why Kant associates the kingdom of ends with the kingdom of God. Kant has the following argument in mind:

1. The kingdom of ends (the moral realm) is what constitutes the highest good (KA 279-80).
2. The highest good requires the postulate of the existence of God (Ak 5:124-5).
3. The kingdom of ends is therefore a kingdom of God(Ak 6:95).

Kant posits God to make logical sense of a kingdom of ends. This does not mean that *we* need to have a belief in God to be members of the kingdom of ends. Kant says that we cannot prove God's existence but can only know for sure the logical possibility of the idea of God(Ak 28:1016) And this is all we need. Kant explains this in the following way:

“No assertoric knowledge (even of God's existence) is required, [but] only a problematic assumption (hypothesis) as regards speculation about the supreme cause of things: faith needs merely the idea of God... only the minimum cognition (it is possible that there is a God) has to be objectively sufficient” (Ak 6: 153-154)

All we need to do is to be aware that it is possible that there is a God. If it were known that there is no God, the highest good would be impossible and the duty to promote the highest good would be nonsense. The possibility of God's existence makes it impossible to rationally shun the duty to promote the highest good. The minimum cognition that God's existence is possible is therefore all that we need from a moral point of view.

Still, Kant thinks that belief in God is helpful for morality from a psychological point of view. That is, our obedience to the moral law is strengthened if we believe in God's existence. Kant thinks that an atheist's effort for morality is always limited. The atheist will eventually tend to “give up as impossible” the struggle for virtue after the realization that virtue does not make him happy and there is no God to meddle in human affairs and fix this problem by making the virtuous happy(Ak 5:452-3).

Does Kant's claim that the kingdom of ends is the kingdom of God on earth (Ak 6:95) contradict Kant's principle of autonomy of will? In the “kingdom of ends”, each member has to legislate universal laws and be subject to these laws.

This is in line with the principle of autonomy- the supreme principle of morality. According to this principle, “the will is a law to itself” (Ak 4:440) An autonomous will obeys no other law than he has legislated for himself and other rational beings. The autonomy of will is the key idea behind human dignity. We are intrinsically worthy and end in ourselves because we have the capacity for self-legislation (autonomy). Autonomy is “what determines the incomparable worth” of humanity (Ak 4:436) If the laws of “the kingdom of ends” are self-made (and hence man-made) in line with the principle of autonomy, how can Kant find a room for God in the kingdom of ends? This is a challenge that any religious interpretation of Kant’s ethics has to meet.

I think that this challenge can be met by invoking Kant’s immanent conception of God. While not denying a transcendental conception of God according to which God is above his creation, Kant also talks about an immanent conception of God- God as the source of the “good will within the (noumenal) self”<sup>8</sup>. We cannot grasp God in His transcendence but we can represent God to ourselves as our good will and develop a rational belief out of that representation. That is, we partake in the goodness of God when we develop a good will. When God is described in such an immanent way, the principle of autonomy is not compromised. We still obey self-made laws to develop a good will and be a member of the kingdom of ends but in doing so we partake in the goodness of God.

Another misinterpretation of Kant’s ethics displays itself in the lack of emphasis on the idea of cooperation of individuals in their fight against evil. It is usually thought that the creation of a moral realm is a task of individuals in isolation. Take for example the following point expressed by Rom Harre: “ Kant’s kingdom of ends generated universal moral laws, but only in so far as they applied to all individuals, taken one by one. The idea of the moral constraints on a predominantly social being played no part”<sup>9</sup> This individualistic reading of Kant is quite mistaken. This is because well-disposed individuals have to unite in an ethical community(Ak 6:94) to bring about a moral realm(kingdom of ends) and

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<sup>8</sup> Kant’s *Opus Postumum*, dargestellt und beurteilt, E. Adickes (Berlin, 1920), p.826. Translation belongs to Keith Ward, *ibid*,pp349

<sup>9</sup> Rom Harre, *One Thousand Years of Philosophy*(Blackwell Publishers: Oxford,2001),pp326

when they do this they acquire a collective(social) identity. The ethical community creates this identity by changing people's attitudes in favor of altruism and friendship and this eradicates the social context of evil, a context in which individuals want to affirm an unjust superiority over others. The social context of evil feeds from the emotions of arrogance, envy, and ingratitude. The source of these emotions is comparative self-love (self-conceit) - our tendency to claim that we are worthier than others. This contradicts the principle of morality, which holds that we are equal in dignity since we all have rational faculties that (when we exercise them correctly) make us autonomous. Kant thinks that this social context based on self-conceit should be done away with and in its place an association in the form of an ethical community should be established. This is the only way we can succeed in our fight against evil. If the source of evil is social, then the struggle against evil should be social too<sup>10</sup>. In Kant's words, this struggle cannot accomplish its purpose "... by the exertion of the single individual toward his own moral perfection, but instead requires a union of such individuals into a whole working toward the same end"(Ak 6:97-98) Once again, this is a union in an ethical community(Ak 6:94)

Kantian ethics is also misinterpreted when it is solely treated within the metaphysics of morals. It is true that Kant deduced the moral laws in a metaphysical way by making use of concepts that are not grounded in human experience-concepts such as the universalizability of maxims, the end of humanity and autonomy. On the basis of this, it is thought that Kant saw ethics as simply

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<sup>10</sup> Christine Korsgaard, Patrick Frierson and Allen Wood are some Kant scholars who have written about this aspect of Kant's ethics. Allen Wood puts heavy emphasis on the social form of the struggle(formation of an "ethical community") against evil. Please see Allen Wood, "Religion, Ethical Community and the Struggle Against Evil", unpublished essay available online at <http://www.stanford.edu/~allenw/webpapers/EthicalCommunity.doc> and Allen Wood, "Kant and the Problem of Human Nature" in Jacobs Brian(ed), *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*( NY: Cambridge University Press,2003)p38-59. Please also see Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*(Cambridge:Cambridge University Press,1999)pp188-212. Korsgaard argues that according to Kant entering into associations and reciprocal relations of responsibility(i.e. friendship) is a duty necessary for moral development. Patrick Frierson's following work is a good discussion of the ethical community : "Providence and Divine Mercy in Kant's Ethical Cosmopolitanism", unpublished essay available online at [http://people.whitman.edu/~frierspr/kant\\_providence.htm](http://people.whitman.edu/~frierspr/kant_providence.htm) ),pp4. I will draw heavily upon these scholars for the construction of my argument.

recognizing the laws of pure practical reason and acting on the basis of these laws<sup>11</sup>. I think that this is not an accurate picture of Kant's ethics. Kant also took the question "what is a human being" from a moral point of view and discussed what a human being can do to do away with his characteristics that prevent him from acting on the moral laws and to cultivate the characteristics that help him recognize the moral law. Kant calls this the science of "moral anthropology" meaning "morality applied to the human being"<sup>12</sup> It is "the counterpart of a metaphysics of morals" which concerns "the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in the carrying-out of the laws of the metaphysics of morals"(Ak 6:217) This is a morally guided psychology<sup>13</sup>. For Kant it is of great importance because without knowledge of the human being, ethics has little effect on human beings: "The reason that morals and sermons... have little effect is due to the lack (Mangel) of knowledge of the human being. Morals must (muss) be united (verbunden...mit) knowledge of humanity" (Ak 25:471-2) In this thesis, I will also pursue Kant's views on moral anthropology and link it with the concept of an ethical community. According to this linkage, the ethical community does away with the psychological hindrances to the recognition of the moral law.

I will, therefore, argue against the formalist, irreligious, individualistic and purely metaphysical readings of Kant's ethics. My thesis will proceed in the following way. In Chapter 1, I will demonstrate that Kant thinks that a selfish pursuit of happiness is doomed to failure. For Kant, one should rather aim at bringing about general happiness in which he can partake in proportion to his virtue. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, this is not only the correct way of approaching happiness but also a duty. I argue, in Chapter 3, that this aim can be

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen Engstrom hints at this idea by arguing that the duty to promote the highest good is a duty addressed to the ethical community. See Stephen Engstrom, "The Concept of the Highest Good in Kant's Moral Theory," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Volume 51, 1992, p. 747-780, pp776-777

<sup>12</sup> Kant, *Moral Metaphysics* II 29:599. Translation belongs to Robert Louden, *ibid*, pp61.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Louden calls this "the second part of morals", the first part being the metaphysics of morals and the deduction of moral laws: Robert Louden, "The Second Part of Morals", in Jacobs Brian(ed), *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*( NY: Cambridge University Press,2003, pp60-84

accomplished only through the formation of an ethical community. Chapter 3 is therefore devoted to elucidating what Kant understands by an ethical community with specific attention to the religious nature of that community. This will culminate in the argument of my thesis: that it is a duty upon individuals to promote the highest good (general happiness distributed in proportion to virtue) and to be able to discharge this duty, they need to develop a beneficent and unselfish will and unite together in an ethical community.



CHAPTER 2:  
KANT ON THE SELFISH PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

2.1 How does an individual pursue his happiness?

Kant gives a utilitarian account of how an individual pursues his happiness. According to this account, happiness is “continuous well-being, enjoyment of life, complete satisfaction with one’s condition” (Ak 6:480). It is pleasure or agreeableness and is measurable in terms of magnitude, duration, costliness and fecundity (Ak 5: 23-24). It consists in a state of contentment with one’s state together with the assurance that this state will last for the future (Ak393, 5:25, Ak 6:387). It is having one’s desires/wishes satisfied (Ak 5:124) In order to be happy, an individual needs to satisfy his desires, experience pleasurable episodes and be content with himself. Striving after happiness is a natural necessity for all people; happiness is an end for all (Ak416)

Kant’s utilitarian account of the selfish pursuit of happiness is a quite sophisticated one. This is because Kant takes into account the fact that people do not only experience feelings of pleasure and pain but also take an attitude towards those feelings and towards their life as a whole<sup>14</sup>. Kant thinks that when judging himself to be happy or miserable, an individual uses his mind (Gemüth) to consider his life as a whole and not just particular moments of pleasure and pain. This is a capacity unique to humanity; on this account, animals can experience pain and pleasure but not happiness or misery. Furthermore, and more importantly, the mind(Gemüth) can find certain pains endurable or even beneficial for wider goals(i.e. the goal of human development) Therefore, a man can experience contentment(Zufriedenheit) while having a painful episode; this

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<sup>14</sup> Susan Meld Shell explains this point aptly( Susan Meld Shell,” Kant’s True Economy of Human Nature” Jacob Brian, *ibid*, p 196-199

contentment is a different state of being from positive enjoyment(Genuss) People have the capacity to estimate the value of pleasure and pain; people may be so strong as to not let pain and pleasure “disturb their mental rest”(Ak:17) Kant even goes so far to suggest that such a strong soul is the happiest soul because it can embrace with great composure whatever pains or pleasures life provides him with. All this suggests that for Kant, attitude towards pain and pleasure is as important as the experience of pain and pleasure as far as happiness is concerned.

Kant thinks that our pursuit of happiness is actually constant shunning pain rather than pursuing the idea of an “unbroken happiness”. He expresses this in the following words:

“Although Mohammed tried to fill heaven with pure, sensible wantonness, it effected as little as when we promise unnamable joys. Pain effects more forcefully; of it we can make a graspable [faesslich] concept- as is already shown by the Mosaic story of creation... Happiness [Glück] is what frees us from pain... Man cannot represent to himself what an enduring enjoyment would be, in which fear and hope did not interchange. Mohammed said of Paradise that it contains a very great supply of food, and very great enjoyment with the female sex, with the so-called beautiful Houris. But human beings are not much enticed by this, and fear of future ill has more effect; for we cannot think to ourselves an idea of unbroken happiness[Glück]; our concepts of happiness depend upon an exchange of well-being and pain”(Ak:1073-5)

Pain is easier for us to represent to ourselves than the idea of an enduring and unbroken enjoyment. Therefore, avoiding pain is our main drive in our pursuit of happiness.

Kant also makes a distinction between various kinds of pleasure or enjoyment: pleasures of sense, ideal pleasures and intellectual pleasures (Ak: 560). Pleasures of sense arise when we sense an object of pleasure while ideal pleasures arise through mere thinking of the object of pleasure without coming into direct contact with it(i.e. as in enjoying the plot of a novel) Intellectual pleasure, on the other hand, arises from the consciousness of following the moral law and can be called moral self-contentment.

The most important aspect of Kant’s sophisticated utilitarianism, however, concerns the systematic nature of the pursuit of happiness. Happiness does not consist in the satisfaction of *all* inclinations that an individual has. An individual

often chooses not to satisfy certain desires that he judges to be destructive of his idea of happiness. A gout-sufferer, for example, may forego the pleasure of a delicious dinner for the sake of his happiness which is dependant on his health(Ak 4:399)Kant says that individuals sum up their inclinations and desires(first-order desires) into the idea of happiness(a second-order desire) which is pursued systematically (Ak 4:399) In the example of the gout-sufferer shows, the first-order desire of a delicious dinner is excluded from the idea of happiness because it contradicted the desire of a healthy life. When we form an idea of happiness we make attempts to avoid contradiction between desires. Happiness is a system of inclinations “brought into a tolerable system” (Ak 5:73-76) Human beings, unlike animals, have negative freedom to choose against satisfying certain desires for the sake of a harmony among desires.

## 2.2 The failure of the systematic and selfish pursuit of happiness

John Kekes, a contemporary theorist of happiness, says that creating an idea of happiness as a second-order desire requires deciding which first-order desires are important and deserve to be included in the idea of happiness<sup>15</sup>. In order to be able to make this decision, an individual needs to have a notion of the kind of life he wants to live. Happiness, therefore, is also the construction of one’s life plan. In our earlier example, the gout-sufferer found health of paramount importance and did not allow the first-order desires that contradicted health into his idea of happiness.

Kant, as we saw, would agree with Kekes on this point. He thinks, however, that what we find important in terms of our happiness is ever-changing and it generally fails us. In other words, our effort to construct a life plan according to an idea of happiness is doomed to failure. This is because “even though everyone wishes to attain happiness, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what it is that he really wishes and wills”(Ak418) The concept of happiness is very indeterminate; it is “impossible for the most insightful and at the same time most powerful, but nonetheless finite, being to frame here a determinate concept of

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<sup>15</sup> John Kekes, “Happiness” in *Mind*, New Series, Vol 91, No. 363( Jul.,1982), 358-376

what it is that he really wills”(Ak418) Kant gives the example of a person who pursues a plan of a happy life based on wealth only to realize later that wealth only makes him less happy because other people always want to make use of him. In an alternative scenario, wealth can generate needs the satisfaction of which is beyond his power. To give another Kantian example, a person who finds the key to a happy life in the good of knowledge may be frustrated due to the dreadful evils which knowledge reveals to him. “Therefore, one cannot act according to determinate principles in order to be happy, but only according to empirical counsels, e.g., of diet, frugality, politeness, reserve, etc., which are shown by experience to contribute on the average the most to well-being” but which are fallible(Ak419)

This is why happiness is not an idea of (pure) reason but of imagination. The faculty of imagination creates an ideal which is based on experience but impossible to attain (Ak419) This is why happiness is a “fluctuating idea” (Ak399), not determinate as to what it promises. And this is exactly the reason many people tend, in some circumstances, to listen to their instincts and enjoy the “present moment” rather than pursue a “possibly groundless expectation” of happiness (Ak399)

Reason’s guidance for a happy life is “weak and delusive” (Ak 395). Reason’s instrumental use to achieve happiness never results in true contentment: “In fact, we find that the more a cultivated reason devotes itself to the aim of enjoying life and happiness, the further does man get away from true contentment” (Ak: 395) The “more common run of men” who allow themselves to be guided by mere natural instinct are to be envied (Ak: 396).

To conclude this chapter, Kant’s account of the selfish pursuit of happiness is utilitarian. Happiness of an individual is a function of the satisfaction of his needs, inclinations and desires. This usually takes the form of shunning pain because pain has a greater force in moving people than the idea of an enduring pleasure.

Kant’s utilitarian account is a quite sophisticated one because he argues that the pursuit of happiness rests on freedom on two grounds. First, we have the freedom to take an attitude with respect to the pains and pleasures we experience in our life as a whole. We have the ability to not let certain painful episodes disturb our state of contentment with life. Secondly, we have the freedom to

choose against satisfying all our desires. We exercise this by creating an ideal (a plan) of happiness, a second-order desire in which the first-order desires are pursued in harmony.

Kant thinks that an individual never finds contentment while pursuing his plan of happiness. This is because the plan can never become a determinate plan of happiness. There is no guarantee, for example, that a plan based on the acquisition of goods such as wealth, knowledge, health is to result in happiness. Empirical counsels which are shown to contribute to happiness on average (i.e. politeness, diet, frugality) –but which are open to exceptions- are all an individual can hope for.

## CHAPTER 3:

### KANT ON THE UNSELFISH PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Kant thinks that the indeterminacy and failure of the rational and selfish pursuit of happiness should not condemn us to the instinctual pursuit of happiness. What we can do is to do away with the selfishness of our wish for happiness and try, by exercising our rational faculties, to create happiness for all and partake in that general happiness in proportion to our virtue. In fact, this is the highest good. It is not only an option but also a duty to promote the highest good

As we saw, we promote general happiness by discharging the duty of beneficence-duty to promote other people's morally permissible happiness. The argument that Kant gives for why we have this duty (duty of beneficence) is the following:

“Since our self-love cannot be separated from our need to be loved(helped in case of need) by others as well, we therefore make ourselves an end for others; and the only way this maxim can be binding is through its qualification as a universal law, hence through our will to make others our ends as well. The happiness of others is therefore an end that is also a duty”  
(Ak 6:394)

The argument is simple: “If I cannot make myself an end for others without making them (that is, their happiness) my end, I have the duty to promote the happiness of others”. This duty is a wide (imperfect) duty. There is no specific limit to how far we should go in promoting the happiness of others. How far one should go depends “on what each person's true needs are in view of his sensibilities and it must be left to each to decide for himself”. Giving a hungry person food, a true need for him, would probably be a good way to discharge the duty of beneficence. Buying him an expensive car, on the contrary, would probably be not such a good way to proceed. The idea is that one should employ his practical wisdom in deciding how this duty should be carried out. It is

important to be reminded that according to Kant, we can refrain from helping others when we think that helping them would be detrimental to their happiness.

While promoting the happiness of others, however, Kant thinks that we should not be indifferent to our own happiness. This is because “discontent with one’s condition under many pressing cares and amid unsatisfied wants might easily become a great temptation to transgress one’s duties” (G: 12, Ak: 399) Kant obviously is making an (empirical) observation: an unhappy person is more likely to transgress his duty than a happy individual. On the basis of this, he thinks that we should not neglect our own happiness because if we are unhappy we are more likely to transgress our duties.

Discharging the duty of beneficence and indirect duty to secure our own happiness are not the only ways to promote general happiness. As we saw, the general happiness in the highest good is general happiness in proportion to virtue (Ak 129). The highest good is actually general happiness in a moral world (KA 809, KB837) We therefore have the duty to create a moral world to be able to promote the highest good. In a moral world, we would be the authors of our well-being and that of others (KA 809, KB 837)

The duty to promote the highest good can be deduced in the following way<sup>16</sup>:

1. It is a duty to act according to the moral law
2. Acting in accordance with the moral law is the only way a moral world can be promoted.
3. The highest good is the moral world. Moral world is conducive to general happiness distributed according to virtue.

If this formulation is correct, then the highest good is not the source of motivation for moral action but rather the object morally motivated people have to produce. Therefore, the concept of the highest good does not contradict Kant’s insistence to rule out any motivation for morality other than respect for the moral law<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> This deduction is well captured by Pauline Kleingeld. See Pauline Kleingeld, “What do the Virtuous Hope For? Re-reading Kant’s Doctrine of the Highest Good”, Proceedings of the Eighth International Kant Congress (Memphis, Marquette University Press, 1995), pp96

<sup>17</sup> Many have argued that since moral motivation consists only in respect for the moral law and not any object to be produced by moral action, the concept of “the highest

Why would be a moral world be conducive to general happiness? In other words, how does our moralization cause general happiness? At least three reasons are possible to think of. First, members of the moral world (“the kingdom of ends”) do not pursue ends that contradict each other. That is, they do not interfere with each other’s freedom to pursue happiness. Secondly, as we saw, members of the moral world contribute to the morally permissible happiness of others. And thirdly, members of the moral world cannot be happy unless others are happy too. This is because their ends are moral ends. They would be happy only through the satisfaction of their moral ends. For example, they would be happy by fighting against the suffering in the world. They would not enjoy a hedonistic kind of happiness in the midst of other people’s sufferings. They would rather enjoy a happiness that arises from the satisfaction of moral ends and it is the pursuit of this kind of happiness that contributes to general happiness.

The duty to promote the highest good does not only include the duty to promote the general happiness but also *to distribute* general happiness according to virtue. This aspect of the duty is problematic. The problem is based on Kant’s own assertion that what determines virtue is the disposition of the moral agent that no one can know but the agent himself. A behavior that has the appearance of a virtuous one might actually have nothing to do with virtue because it might be motivated by self-love- as in the case of a shopkeeper who charges a fair price in order to avoid earning a bad reputation which can decrease his profit. In other words, we cannot know if a person has virtue and this makes us unable to distribute happiness according to virtue. It could be argued that since performing this duty is impossible and “ought to” (duty) implies “can” (possibility to perform the duty) there can be no such duty at all.

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good” does not belong to Kant’s pure ethics. See the following works. 1) Schopenhauer. *The World as Will and Representation*, (trans) E.F.J. Payne [New York: Dover Publications, 1958] 2:254, (trans) Stephen Engstrom, 2) Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s Critique of Practical Reason* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960], 242-245, 3) Jeffrie G. Murphy, “The Highest Good as Content for Kant’s Ethical Formalism,” *Kant Studien* 56 [1965]: 102-10, 4) Thomas Auxter, “The Unimportance of Kant’s Highest Good,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 17 [April 1979]: 121-34”. This is not an accurate criticism because the “highest good” is not a motivation of moral action but the object it has to produce.



Kant was aware of this problem and dealt with it by means of the postulate of God's existence. As we saw, "the possibility of the highest good... occurs only under the condition of the existence of God" (Ak 5:124-25) This is because only God can ensure the distribution of happiness according to virtue. The promotion of the highest good happens, therefore, through a division of labor between God and us. We promote general happiness without proportioning it to virtue because we cannot assess the virtue of people. We then leave it to God to make the distribution according to virtue (in this world and in afterlife); we *hope* that God takes care of that. On the basis of this *hope*, we act *as if* it is possible that happiness can be distributed according to virtue. This hope is necessary "from a moral point of view,

in order to add through mere ideas of reason a final touch to the theory of the possibility of that to which we are already of itself obligated, namely striving after the advancement of the highest good in the world, while we ourselves make these objects, God, freedom in a practical quality, and immortality, only as a result of the advancement of moral laws and freely give them objective reality, because we are assured that no contradiction can be found in these ideas"(AK, 20:298-99)<sup>18</sup>

By coming up with the ideas of God and immortality and hoping that God distributes happiness in proportion to virtue in this world and in afterlife, we can take upon ourselves the duty to promote the highest good.

According to Kant, by pursuing the highest good we satisfy a need of our reason. "It cannot be a matter of indifference to reason how to answer the question, What then is the result of this right conduct of ours?"(Ak 6:5) This need is "effected in [the human will] by morality" and it is a need "of adding to the thought of one's duties an ultimate end as well, as their consequence"(Ak 6,6) In other words, we(our reason) would be dissatisfied if we did not direct our good conduct towards the ultimate end of general happiness.

As a conclusion to this chapter, happiness in the highest good is general happiness distributed in proportion to virtue. This is not a hedonistic account of happiness. It is causally related to morality. The happiness in the highest good is achieved through the creation of a moral world that is conducive to general happiness. This achievement is the task of cooperating and unselfish individuals

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<sup>18</sup> I have used Paul Guyer's translation. See Guyer, *ibid*, pp364

who make “the happiness of all” their end. I will argue that for Kant, this cooperation means the uniting of people in the ethical community. Collective happiness can only be an accomplishment of individuals who aim to make the sensible world conform to the moral world by establishing an ethical community. This is why the next chapter is devoted to an analysis of what Kant means by an ethical community.

## CHAPTER 4: THE ETHICAL COMMUNITY

### 4.1 The features and the religious source of the ethical community

Kant uses the notion of an ethical community in his *Religion*. He says that “an association of human beings merely under the laws of virtue, ruled by this idea, can be called an ethical and, so far as these laws are public, an ethico-civil (in contrast to juridico-civil) society, or an ethical community” (Ak 6:94) The laws of virtue that govern the ethical community establish a unity between the ends of rational beings. In the words of Allen Wood:” Between the ends of rational beings there would be a *reciprocity*, so that the pursuit of each end would advance the pursuit of others, and human ends would constitute a self-organizing whole, combined into a unity like the parts of a living organism”<sup>19</sup> Ethical community is therefore the concretization of the ideal: “kingdom of ends”. According to Kant, to form an ethical community is a duty of human beings. In other words, the idea of an ethical community has an “entirely well-grounded, objective reality in human reason, in the duty to join such a state” (Ak 6:95)

Kant recognizes four features of the ethical community. First, the membership in the community is universal because its unity is based on laws of virtue shared by all rational beings (Ak 7:333) This is Kant’s ethical cosmopolitanism. Secondly, the incentives that motivate membership in it are pure moral incentives. The third feature is freedom, which means that the ethical community does not allow the rule of a coercive government. Fourthly, the constitution of the ethical community is unchangeable though its mode of administration is free and open (Ak 6:101-102).

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<sup>19</sup> Allen Wood, “ Religion, Ethical Community and the Struggle Against Evil”, unpublished essay available online at, <http://www.stanford.edu/~allenw/webpapers/EthicalCommunity.doc>, pp14

The unity of the ethical community is not maintained by a coercive state. The ethical community is not a political community. Still, the ethical community has public laws just as the political community- though these are laws of virtue. Kant thinks that a combined will of the members of the community (general will) cannot be the legislator of the public laws of virtue. “Such a fallible and contingently restricted will would be inappropriate for a moral community”<sup>20</sup> Only the will of God satisfies the condition of purity that is required of the will that can be the legislator of the laws of virtue (Ak 6:227: 6:99) The legislator of the ethical community is, therefore, God and the ethical community is a religious community. Religion, here, is not an established religion with all its textual sources and institutional structure. What Kant has in mind is moral religion where “religion is simply the recognition of our duties as divine commands” (Ak 6:153: 6:443)

As I hinted earlier, Kant’s indication of a divine source of legislation may be found to be in contradiction with Kant’s principle of the “autonomy of the will” (Ak 440). According to that principle, “the will is a law to itself” (Ak 440) That is, the will imposes on itself its own laws. If the laws of virtue are legislated by God, it may seem that the will is not a law to itself but rather that God’s law is a law to the will.

As we saw, Kant solves this problem by saying that we should not represent God to ourselves as an alien entity that imposes on us alien laws. God is the source of the moral principle *within* us. In Kant’s words, “God must be represented not as substance outside me, but as the highest moral principle in me”<sup>21</sup>. “The conception of God is... the pure practical Reason itself in its personality”<sup>22</sup>. Another expression of this idea is:

” There is a Being in me, distinguished from myself as the cause of an effect wrought upon me, which freely... judges me within, justifying or

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<sup>20</sup> Allen Wood, “ Religion, Ethical Community and the Struggle Against Evil”, unpublished essay available online at <http://www.stanford.edu/~allenw/webpapers/EthicalCommunity.doc> , pp16

<sup>21</sup> Kant’s Opus Postumum, dargestellt und beurteilt, E. Adickes (Berlin, 1920), p.826. The translation belongs to Keith Ward, “Kant’s Teleological Ethics”, The Philosophical Quarterly, Vol 21, No.85( Oct., 1971), 337-351,pp349

<sup>22</sup> Kant’s Opus Postumum, dargestellt und beurteilt, E. Adickes (Berlin, 1920), p.826. Translation belongs to Keith Ward, *ibid*,pp349

condemning me; and I as man am myself this being, and it is no substance external to me, and... its causality is no natural necessity but a determination of me to a free act<sup>23</sup>”

This is what I called the immanent conception of God in Kant’s thought. It does not replace but exists side by side with the transcendental conception. Kant seems to imply that since we cannot comprehend God as a transcendental entity, we should represent God to ourselves according to the immanent conception. This is the only way to have a rational religion. If we recognize God in his immanence, our belief in his transcendence can be considered rational. The ethical community is therefore a religious and *rational* community. Its members partake in a divine essence as they accept the laws of virtue that bind the community. This establishes that the religious nature of the ethical community does not contradict Kant’s principle of autonomy.

The question remains, however, *why* Kant thinks religion is essential to the ethical community. Allen Wood and Patrick Frierson provide us with two different answers to this question.

According to Allen Wood, Kant’s insistence on the religious nature of the ethical community does not stem from the fact that belief in God is a prerequisite for membership in the ethical community. In fact, Wood thinks that Kant did not see belief in God as a condition for membership in the ethical community. Wood makes use of Kant’s following view that we also saw earlier:

“No assertoric knowledge (even of God’s existence) is required, [but] only a problematic assumption (hypothesis) as regards speculation about the supreme cause of things: faith needs merely the idea of God... only the minimum cognition (it is possible that there is a God) has to be objectively sufficient” (Ak 6: 153-154)

Wood infers from this passage that an agnostic position, insofar as it is a position that does not deny the possibility of the existence of God, is acceptable for the ethical community. Allen Wood explains this in the following way:

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<sup>23</sup> Kant’s *Opus Postumum*, dargestellt und beurteilt, E. Adickes (Berlin, 1920), p.824. Translation belongs to Keith Ward, *ibid.*, pp.349

“To be religious, then, I do not even have to believe in the existence of God. To be religious, then, I do not even have to believe in the existence of God. Religion requires that I have duties, that I have a concept of God (as a *possible* supreme cause of things), and that my awareness of duty is subjectively enlivened by the thought that if there is a God, then my duties are divine commands”<sup>24</sup>

Wood then goes on to explain how an agnostic, who is undecided about God, can magnify his awareness of his duty by seeing the laws of virtue as divine commands. The agnostic should ask himself, Wood thinks, the question: If the laws of virtue that govern the ethical community were not divine commands, could these laws have public recognition by the members of the ethical community as binding?(Ak 6:227, 6:99) According to Wood, the best way an agnostic may think of the moral laws as having public recognition is to think of them as issued by (possible or actual) God whose sovereignty unites people in an ethical community<sup>25</sup> The agnostic, therefore, has to grant that laws of virtue would not be publicly recognized and would not be able to bind the members of ethical community if they were not divinely authorized. This is similar to saying that the agnostic may feel the bond with the community only through having a religious perspective towards his duties.

Patrick Frierson rejects Wood’s position and argues that membership in the ethical community demands the “psychologically compelling force of belief”<sup>26</sup>. Frierson’s interpretation makes use of Kant’s argument that non-belief in God “damages the moral disposition” (Ak 5:452-3) Kant gives the example of a righteous man (like Spinoza) who has a firm conviction that there is no God. Kant thinks that “his effort [to be righteous] is limited “because nature does not cooperate with him and does not endow him with happiness. Spinoza who would not want his virtue to be the cause of his misery has to “give up as impossible” his striving for morality. The only way to avoid this would be “to assume the existence of the moral author of the world, i.e. of God” (Ak 5:452-3). The

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<sup>24</sup> Allen Wood, “ Religion, Ethical Community and the Struggle Against Evil”, unpublished essay available online at <http://www.stanford.edu/~allenw/webpapers/EthicalCommunity.doc> , pp6

<sup>25</sup> See Allen Wood, *ibid*, pp17

<sup>26</sup>This is an expression of Paul Guyer. See Paul Guyer, *Kant on Freedom, Law and Happiness*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2000), pp363

cultivation of moral disposition that is demanded of the members of the ethical community is impossible without the psychologically compelling belief in God and divine mercy (in the doctrine that God helps those who want to eradicate the radical evil in themselves).

Frierson's interpretation has some advantages over the interpretation of Wood. Wood's interpretation that allows room for the agnostic in the ethical community cannot adequately explain how a person (the agnostic) would see himself as a part of a community under divine command when he is skeptical of God. Furthermore, as we saw, Kant clearly states that without a firm belief in God, one's effort to cultivate a moral disposition is limited.

Still, Wood's point that an agnostic position is adequate for a moral disposition is well rooted in Kant's assertion that we only need the idea of the possibility of God's existence to be rationally consistent in our strive after virtue. Therefore, I argue that belief in God is not a necessary condition in membership in the ethical community but it *helps* us to bond with the laws of the ethical community much strongly by making a compelling effect on our psychology.

Kant makes several important points while endorsing this view. The first is that the doctrines of God and divine mercy should have "universal communicability" (Ak 6:96) Therefore, these doctrines should be purified from historical contingencies and dogmas of established religions. Kant is therefore after "pure religion" which is "within the limits of reason". This is why Kant's allusions to Scriptures should be read not as historical allusions but as attempts to establish a rational religion. A good example for the kind of Biblical interpretation that Kant favors would be an interpretation that does not so much make use of Jesus' divinity and miracles as the (moral) parables that Jesus teaches. If religion is seen as pure, rational and beyond the dogmas and contingencies of established religions, the cosmopolitan nature of the ethical community is not compromised. No particular religion, with a set of historical contingencies and dogmas, can gain ascendancy over others and exclude them.

The second important point Kant makes is that the doctrine of divine mercy should not be interpreted in such a way as to inhibit morality. If divine mercy is so interpreted as to suggest 1) that morally good conduct is not a human accomplishment but only a gift from God (Ak 6:191), and 2) that God will simply forgive and take care of people irrespective of their virtue (Ak 6:76), and 3) that

rituals, endorsed by the Church, will gain people the favor of God (Ak6:170), then divine mercy would not contribute to morality but rather inhibit it. All of these mistaken interpretations would drive people to laziness in their effort for morality. The worst of all, they would make people justify their laziness with the belief that God takes care of all irrespective of their effort. The only morally acceptable interpretation of divine mercy is that God helps only those who develop a good moral disposition “through their own powers” (Ak6:191). As for rituals, Kant finds the belief that mere observance of religious rituals can help people in any way unacceptable (Ak 6:170). He emphatically says that “ Apart from a good life-conduct, anything which the human being supposes that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is mere religious delusion”(Ak6:170)Therefore, the service of priestcraft that uses petitionary prayers, magic and sorcery and other morally indifferent rituals is merely a “counterfeit service” and is despicable(KA 6:151-202)

#### 4.2 The need for an ethical community

Why does Kant think that human beings need to form an ethical community? The answer that I propose is that for Kant, the ethical community is necessary because the nature of evil that human beings should combat is social (“our social lives provide fertile breeding grounds for evil”<sup>27</sup>) and therefore the solution against this evil should be social too<sup>28</sup>. Human beings need to make a moral reform and establish an ethical community. The ethical community changes what we care about in our lives. In the ethical community, we care so much about our

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<sup>27</sup> Patrick Frierson(“Providence and Divine Mercy in Kant’s Ethical Cosmopolitanism”, unpublished essay available online at [http://people.whitman.edu/~frierspr/kant\\_providence.htm](http://people.whitman.edu/~frierspr/kant_providence.htm) pp4

<sup>28</sup> Allen Wood and Patrick Frierson endorse this view quite emphatically. Allen Wood (Allen Wood, “ Religion, Ethical Community and the Struggle Against Evil”, unpublished essay available online at <http://www.stanford.edu/~allenw/webpapers/EthicalCommunity.doc> ) and Patrick Frierson(“Providence and Divine Mercy in Kant’s Ethical Cosmopolitanism”, unpublished essay available online at [http://people.whitman.edu/~frierspr/kant\\_providence.htm](http://people.whitman.edu/~frierspr/kant_providence.htm) ) defend this argument.



capacity for virtue that we begin to find marks of superiority in terms of wealth, status, and knowledge insignificant.

Kant thinks that it is very difficult for individuals to fight their evil tendencies if they live in societies that foster evil. What does Kant have in mind when he speaks about the evil aspects of societies? What is the predisposition in human nature that paves the way for the creation of such evil societies? I will argue that according to Kant, we create these evil societies through our propensity to see ourselves superior to others. This propensity lies in what Kant calls “our predisposition to humanity” and is displayed in our selfish pursuit of happiness. If we cannot check our propensity to affirm superiority over others, we are condemned to living in a society that fosters envy, distrust, ingratitude and other similar vices. These vices bombard our soul and heavily hinder us in our fight against evil.

To see how Kant develops this idea, it is helpful to look at Kant’s discussion of human psychology. Kant singles out three predispositions in human nature. One of these dispositions is our “animality” meaning a total of our natural desires (survival, eating, sex and desire to be among other human beings). The second disposition is our “humanity” through which we set ends according to reason and create the idea of “happiness” by establishing a harmony between our first-order desires. Kant calls the third predisposition “personality”, the capacity for morality, which is exercised in giving and obeying the laws of reason (Ak 6:26)

In trying to find out which of these three predispositions fosters evil, we may rule out the predisposition to personality because evil is exactly what it fights against. Now, Kant says that the enemy of morality “is not to be sought in the natural inclinations” but rather in the will that is so deceived that it does not moderate the pursuit of inclinations and desires in accordance with duty (Ak 6:57-58) Therefore, the enemy of morality is not the pursuit of happiness but rather the pursuit of happiness that is not governed by the commands of duty<sup>29</sup>.

Our predisposition to “humanity” becomes the main source of vice because its impact on our pursuit of happiness contradicts the commands of duty. This

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<sup>29</sup> To give an example, when we pursue our happiness by satisfying the desires that arise from our “animality” without limiting ourselves by the command of duty, we fall into the “bestial vices of gluttony, lust and wild lawlessness in relation to other human beings”(Ak 6:27)

predisposition is based on a comparative use of reason. It contains “a self-love which is physical and yet involves comparison” (Ak 6:27). “Out of this comparative self-love originates the inclination to *gain worth in the opinion of others*” which is first an inclination to gain *equal worth* but later leads to an “unjust desire to acquire superiority for oneself over others”(Ak 6:27) Kant calls this inclination “self-conceit” or irrational self-love(Ak 5:73-74) Our self-conceit contradicts the moral idea that all rational beings are equal in dignity(intrinsic worth) (KA 5:73) According to Kant, as far as our predisposition to humanity is concerned, our self-conceit takes the upper hand in our (selfish) pursuit of happiness. This pursuit is based on our comparative use of our reason:” only in comparison with others does one judge oneself happy or unhappy” (Ak 6:27) We don’t just want to be happy but we want to be *happier* than and superior to others. When combining our inclinations (our first-order desires) into the ideal of happiness (a second order desire) we want our ideal of happiness to be superior to others. This tendency leads to the “vices of culture” or “diabolical vices” which are, “in their extreme degree of malignancy”, “envy, ingratitude, joy in other’s misfortunes” (Ak 6:27)

Allen Wood thinks that this ascendancy to superiority is in fact what drives us to come up with an ideal of happiness<sup>30</sup>. Wood thinks that if it were not for our desire to be superior to others, we would rather choose the haphazard satisfaction of inclinations instead of a systematic plan of how to pursue the satisfaction of our inclinations. In other words, we create a systematic plan of happiness only to stand superior in comparison to others. I do not completely agree with Wood. It is true that Kant thinks that while forming our ideal of happiness, we certainly take into consideration other people’s ideals of happiness and want to create a better ideal than theirs. However, Kant is also aware that we also take into account what kind of a life we find meaningful to live in accordance with our character. We engage in new horizons of experience to develop a character that we hope will make our lives meaningful. Cultivating some desires accords well with the character that we want to have and cultivating some others does not. We choose to act on the desires

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<sup>30</sup> See Allen Wood, “Kant vs. Eudaimonism”, forthcoming in Predrag Cicovacki (ed.), *Kant’s Legacy: Essays Dedicated to Lewis White Beck*( Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000)

that do accord well. These factors are very important in how we judge about our well-being<sup>31</sup>.

Still, Wood is correct to say that for Kant, comparative self-love (self-conceit) is a major component of our pursuit of happiness and is prone to lead to vices such as envy, ingratitude, and joy in other people's misery. To avoid these vices, we should check our drive to deny people equal worth.

These vices (envy, ingratitude, and joy in other people's misery) arise in a social context. They are the consequences of the exercise of self-conceit. Kant concedes that self-conceit and the competition among human beings that follows from it has a benefit. The antagonism that arises from the competition for superiority drives us to develop the faculties of our species driving away from laziness (Ak 6:27) On the other hand, however, self-conceit is a powerful hindrance to self-mastery and virtue (6:94)

Kant sometimes calls our comparative self-love(self-conceit) our "unsociable sociability"(Ak 8:20-22) This means that seeking comparison with others makes us social beings- in that we value the opinion of others concerning our worth. At the same time, however, it makes us unsocial beings that claim a morally unacceptable superiority over others. This makes us focus on distinctions in terms of the components of happiness (i.e., wealth, power, status) rather than on the command of morality. This social context, and not the raw human nature, is the enemy of morality. In Kant's words:

“ If [a human being] searches for the causes and the circumstances that draw into this danger[i.e., assault of the evil principle] and keep him there, he can easily convince himself that they do not come his way from his own raw nature... but rather from the human beings to whom he stands in relation or association”(Ak 6:93)

The assault of the evil principle takes place in the way people associate and the rationale of this association, which is the pursuit of happiness driven by self-conceit.

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<sup>31</sup> For an explanation of this, please see Patrick Kain," Prudential Reason in Kant's Anthropology", in Jacobs Brian(ed), *Essays on Kant's Anthropology*( NY: Cambridge University Press,2003,pp230-265, pp 241

The view that evil arises from the social context [a morally corrupt community] should not be taken to mean that we, as individuals, have no moral responsibility. That would be a gross misinterpretation of Kant's ethical thought. Because according to Kant, it should be presupposed that we are free either to act on self-love (i.e. comparative self love) or act on the basis of the moral law (Ak 448). In other words, even if the society in which we live tempts us to act on morally dangerous desires of envy, arrogance and self-conceit we may choose to abide by the command of duty. A social determinist reading of Kant would, therefore, be a mistaken interpretation of Kant's moral thought.

I want to render the social context of evil not as the *determining* ground of our volition and of our wickedness but rather as a great hindrance to our *recognition* of our capacity for morality. Once again, in a morally corrupt social context, we are too preoccupied with comparing ourselves with other people's well-being as constituted by wealth, status and power that we neglect the correct (moral) standpoint from which we should evaluate ourselves and others. According to this correct (moral) standpoint, we have absolute worth as rational beings and our worth is not determined in comparison with others. We may lose worth and feel shame not because others are superior to us in terms of social efficacy but because we do not abide by the moral law. The social context based on unsociable sociability causes vice by turning our attention away from this correct (moral) standpoint from which we should evaluate ourselves and others. Moral responsibility, however, belongs to *us*- it is our duty to discover the proper (moral) evaluation. In fact, the moral reform and the establishment of the ethical community may only occur when we discharge this duty of correct evaluation of others and ourselves.

Kant thinks that not only the self-conceited but also the hermit (who denies association with others) fails to discover the proper (moral) evaluation according to which we have absolute worth as rational beings. Kant calls the hermit's attitude "negative misanthropy", "timidity", "anthropophobia" (Ak 6:450) The hermit's attitude contradicts the duties of love and the duty to associate. The duty to associate is a "duty to oneself as well as others not to isolate oneself, but to use one's moral perfection in social intercourse to cultivate a disposition of reciprocity--agreeableness, tolerance, mutual love and respect...and so to associate

the graces with virtue. To bring this about is itself a duty of virtue.”(Ak 6:473)The hermit’s attitude contradicts this duty to associate.

The solution that Kant has in mind is therefore not to deny association but rather change the nature of the association. In other words, the solution is to turn the association into the ethical community, the features of which has been discussed earlier. This solution is indispensable to fight evil and accomplish the highest good (virtue combined with happiness) In Kant’s words:

“The highest good cannot be achieved merely by the exertion of the single individual toward his own moral perfection, but instead requires a union of such individuals into a whole working toward the same end- a system of well-disposed human beings, in which and through whose unity alone the highest good can come to pass”(Ak 6:97-98)

Kant is emphatic that well-disposed human beings should *unite*. This is clearly an indication of Kant’s conviction that without such a union, the social context based on competition, resentment and self-conceit will continue to foster evil and limit the effort of people to cultivate a good disposition. Another firm conviction of Kant is that well-disposed human beings (whose union is the ethical community) can only be brought about through moral education: “man must be educated to be good” (6:324-5) When Kant says “moral education”, he does not only have in mind the question how human beings discover the Categorical Imperative.

Another aspect of moral education is how human beings can come to know the subjective conditions that make it difficult for them to follow to moral law (i.e., desire for wealth, status, power) and then remove those conditions. This aspect is, as we saw earlier, what Kant calls the “counterpart of metaphysics of morals”, is critical for the ethical community (Ak 6:217). Therefore, the ethical community should have not only laws of virtue but also measures to remove the hindrances to morality- conditions that make it difficult for human beings to follow the moral law.

### 4.3 The content of the ethical community

What are the content of the laws of virtue and the ways in which hindrances to morality can be removed? The answer that I propose to this question is the following: The laws of virtue that keep the ethical community together are laws that express the duties of respect and duties of love to others. The laws that express the duties of respect to others are: “1) Do not treat others with contempt, 2) Do not defame others, 3) Do not ridicule others” The laws that express the duties of love to others are: 1) Promote the happiness of others, 2) Show gratitude to your benefactor, 3) Cultivate your feeling of sympathy for others. All these laws have the common quality of making us realize that we share an equal worth due to our humanity.

Treating others with contempt is a mark of arrogance. Arrogance is an ambition to be on top (oben zu schwimmen) and to demand that “others think little of themselves in comparison with us” (Ak 6:645) It contradicts the principle of morality according to which every one has equal intrinsic worth. Hence the law, “Do not treat others with contempt”. The ethical community has to be against the competition for honor and boasting about ranks of honor since this competition kills the spirit of equality in human dignity. Similarly, defaming others by gossiping about them and exposing their faults with the aim of ruining their reputation is unacceptable in the ethical community (Ak 6:466) Ridicule, which is making the faults of other people an object of amusement, is a vice that the ethical community should avoid (Ak 6:647) What the ethical community should do is not to legally punish the defamers and ridiculers but rather to promote a culture in which defamers and ridiculers cannot breed. Kant does not spell out how this may be done. But, it could be speculated that a good way to proceed would be to expose the defamers and ridiculers to their own ignorance of the moral principle based on human dignity.

Kant thinks that a culture that promotes the vices of arrogance, defamation and ridicule creates a servile disposition in people who fall behind in the race of competition. Kant is against this servile disposition as much as the arrogant disposition. A servile person violates a duty to his self by treating himself with

contempt rather than with the intrinsic value befitting a human being. To avoid the servile disposition, Kant makes the following suggestions:

“ Be no man’s lackey.- Do not let others tread with impunity on your rights.- Contract no debt for which you cannot give full security.- Do not accept favors you could do without, and do not be a parasite or a flatterer or ... a beggar... Kneeling down or prostrating oneself on the ground, even to show your veneration for heavenly objects, is contrary to the dignity of humanity... for you then humble yourself, not before an ideal represented to you by your own reason, but before an *idol* of your making”(Ak 6:437)

The ethical community, therefore, should not have a culture that fosters servility. It is noteworthy that Kant emphatically rejects “intellectual servility”: humbly accepting the guidance of idols and ideals that have not their origins in human reason. In other words, Kant’s ethical community is also a project of Enlightenment meaning “man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity” where immaturity is “the inability to use own one's understanding without the guidance from another”<sup>32</sup>. Kant’s ethical community does not guarantee anyone irrational authority to be the moral teacher of the community. The standard to judge any moral teaching is pure practical reason.

The ethical community is characterized not only by laws that follow from the duties of respect but also from the duties of love. The duties of love are duties of beneficence, gratitude and the cultivation of a sympathetic feeling toward others. The duty of beneficence is, as we saw, to promote according to one’s means the happiness of others in need, without hoping for something in return (6:453) Gratitude consists in honoring a person because of a benefit he rendered. This honoring should not be based on a “prudential maxim” of encouraging the benefactor for further beneficence but rather on sincere appreciation of his help. Duty to cultivate a sympathetic feeling is a duty to share in other people’s feelings of joy and misery. Kant thinks that Nature “has already implanted in human beings receptivity to the [sympathetic feeling]”(6:456) What is incumbent on us is to cultivate this feeling by “not avoiding the places where the poor who lack the most basic necessities are to be found but rather to seek them out, and not to shun

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<sup>32</sup> Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment” in Kant, Political Writings,(ed) Hans Reiss, (trans)H.B Nisbet(Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1991)

sickrooms or debtor's prisons and so forth in order to avoid sharing painful feelings one may not be able to resist"(6:457) All this implies that Kant's ethical community encourages recognition of suffering, the activity of charity to reduce this suffering and gratitude to people who carry out charity.

Aside from the laws of virtue based on duties of respect and duties of love, the members of the ethical community should be endowed with the virtues of social intercourse. These are "affability, sociability, courtesy, hospitality, and gentleness (in disagreeing without quarreling) "(Ak 6:474) They may be couched in the general category of politeness. Kant discusses politeness in his *Moral Anthropology*. It is Patrick Frierson who gives a succinct account of Kant's discussion of the moral importance of politeness<sup>33</sup>. Kant grants that affability, sociability, courtesy, hospitality, and gentleness (which go under the general name of politeness) are only tokens and illusions of virtue (Ak 6:474) "Yet they promote the feeling for virtue itself" (Ak 6:474) According to Frierson, they do this in the following way. One of the major human hindrances to morality is deceiving oneself that one is simply incapable of self-mastery and virtue. Kant thinks that politeness, though it may be a mere appearance, fights against this self-deception by showing one that he is indeed capable of self-mastery:

"In society everyone is well-behaved, [but] everything is appearance, the desires of the citizens against each other are there; in acting everyone burns with wickedness..., and yet he is as composed and indifferent as if this did not stir him at all. Truly this betrays a self-mastery [Selbsbeherrschung] and is the beginning of conquering oneself [Selbstbeziehung] It is a step towards virtue" (Ak 25:930)

Politeness shows that one is indeed capable of self-mastery. Additionally, according to Kant, politeness inspires love for virtue. When a person appears polite, others love him. Seeing that the appearance of virtue inspires love, human beings tend to make the appearance real: "one who loves the illusion of the good eventually is won over to actually loving the good. One loves those people who are always polite to others" (Ak 25:931) We are all affected by examples of virtue. Seeing those examples, even though these may be mere appearances, leads one to investigate his own virtue. Christ, for example," appeals to the way [his

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<sup>33</sup> Patrick Frierson, "The Moral Importance of Politeness in Kant's *Anthropology*", *Kantian Review* January 2005



followers] would of themselves voluntarily act if they examined themselves properly”(Ak 8:338) Learning from the examples of people like Christ is an indispensable step to self-examination without which virtue is impossible.

We are now in a position to answer the question whether Kant's notion of an ethical community warrants us to say that the individualistic reading of Kant's ethics is an incorrect reading. Can the individualistic reading of Kant's ethics come to terms with the notion of the ethical community? I think that it cannot because Kant's ethical community is not simply an agreement of isolated and not necessarily social individuals on certain laws of virtue. In other words, individuals in Kant's ethical community are social beings and the ethical community endows them with a collective identity. They share a collective moral end of transforming their society so as to become (morally) better individuals. The collective identity that arises out of sharing a collective moral end has an impact on their beliefs and attitudes. Moral education in the ethical community *makes* them praise certain values (i.e. charity, cooperation) and despise certain other values (i.e. arrogance, intellectual servility). Furthermore, their attitude becomes more altruistic. They make each other's end their own end. This is exactly how Kant defines friendship<sup>34</sup> and friendship would therefore be a good analogy for the ethical community. Kant sometimes goes so far as to liken the ethical community to a family. He says that the ethical community "could best of all be likened to the constitution of a household(a family) under a common though invisible moral father, whose holy son, who knows the father's will and yet stands in blood relation with all the members of the family, takes his father's place by making the other members better acquainted with his will; these therefore honor the father in him and thus enter into a free, universal and enduring union of hearts"(Ak 6:102) In the analogy between the ethical community and the family, we see certain elements that an individualistic reading could not account for. What we see is not an agreement of isolated individuals on certain principles but rather "a union of hearts". Furthermore, in the ethical community, the moral message is constantly disseminated into the ethical community (perhaps through moral education) so as to make the members of the ethical community "better acquainted with" moral

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<sup>34</sup> Please see Lectures on Ethics, 203 for a definition of friendship. "I, from generosity, look after his happiness and he similarly looks after mine; I do not throw away my happiness but surrender it to his keeping, and he in turn surrenders into my hands"

religion, "the will of the father"(Ak 6:102), and therefore better equipped for moral improvement. This also teaches us that the communitarian and the religious readings of Kant come together neatly. We have seen that Kant sees the hope for the possibility of God's existence and the psychologically compelling effect of belief to be morally very important. The ethical community, "a union of hearts" under an "invisible moral father"(Ak 6:102), cherishes this hope and psychology. This yields the social context in which we can become aware of our absolute worth as rational beings and capacity for moral self-legislation and moral perfection more easily. Perhaps, Kant had to give us a more detailed account of the emotional aspect of the ethical community and the social determinants of moral religion. That would give us a more solid ground to see that for Kant moral religion is not simply a subjective, optional and private recognition of duties as divine commands but a phenomenon deeply rooted in our psychology as social beings and our collective (social) aim of moral reform. Still, however, I believe that we have good reason to suppose that what Kant had in mind when he discussed the notion of an ethical community was essentially different from an artificial union of isolated individuals on the basis of certain abstract principles.

To conclude this chapter, Kant's ethical community is a union of well-disposed individuals who recognize their equality as human beings and their duties of respect and love to each other and act according to laws based on these duties. The obedience to these laws has an emotional and religious aspect to it. The ethical community fights the vices of arrogance, defamation, and ridicule and promotes charity. It is a community that finds intellectual servility despicable. Furthermore, it encourages the norm of politeness to remove the hindrances to morality (i.e. self-deception that one is incapable of self-mastery) It is only by establishing such a community, human beings can bring about the highest good (general happiness combined with virtue)

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have argued against a formalist interpretation of Kant's ethics and pursued the idea that for Kant, morality aims at happiness and its proper distribution. This happiness is collective happiness and the criterion for its proper distribution is virtue. Achieving this is also a collective project and this is why I have opted for a communitarian reading of Kantian ethics. For Kant we are social beings and when we live in morally corrupt societies, we cannot easily appreciate the importance of virtue and discover our capacity for freely choosing a virtuous life. An ethical community, on the other hand, motivates us to change our attitudes in favor of morality. Kant's ethical community goes beyond a mere agreement on certain laws of virtue and appeals to our altruistic feelings (i.e. our need and capacity for friendship) and to our hope that God may exist. The possibility of God's existence is an idea that we need to be able to promote general happiness distributed in proportion to virtue. This, along with the psychologically compelling effect of belief, is the reason I choose to interpret Kant's ethics from a religious point of view. By grounding an anti-formalist interpretation of Kant's ethics on a combination of a communitarian and religious readings, I think that we can see how Kant reconciles morality and (general) happiness.

I acknowledge that for Kant happiness cannot be the determining ground of a morally motivated will because the notion of duty requires a categorical command and imperatives based on happiness never command categorically (Ak 425). They command actions only as means to the promotion of happiness. Prudence, meaning the "skill in the choice of means to one's own greatest well-being" (Ak 415-6) can never be the foundation of morality. This is most clear when we look at Kant's identification of prudence with "the skillful use of other people in the pursuit of one's own ends" (Ak 8:322-25) Morality, for Kant,

prohibits using others merely with the purpose of advancing our own ends.

In this thesis, one of my arguments has been that the clash between happiness and morality is most obvious in a selfish and comparative pursuit of happiness. For Kant, our selfish pursuit of happiness is driven by desires that arise in social life. This is why I emphasized the social aspect of Kant's account of prudence and happiness. According to Kant, we replace our instinctual drives with new drives that arise in social life (Ak 25:585) Some of these new drives are innocent. To give a Kantian example for these, most young men do not marry at the age when they are physically ready but want to wait for the time when they are cultivated enough to court a woman. Some others are not so innocent: lust of power, avarice, thirst for vengeance, having influence over others (Ak8:80, 87,185) The common feature of all these drives is the tendency to compare ourselves with others. While pursuing our happiness, we cannot but observe what others are like and what they are doing. As prudent individuals, we want to conform to others and avoid being perceived as weird and difficult. At the same time, however, we want to affirm some sort of superiority over them. We want our ideal of happiness to be superior to theirs. This is also a claim to having superior worth. Therefore, it is a claim that challenges the principle of morality that we are equal in dignity.

According to Kant, our selfish pursuit of happiness that goes hand in hand with our claim that we are worthier than others can never lead to true contentment. Our desires are volatile and are immediately replaced with new ones when they are fulfilled. We cannot depend upon any of highly regarded goods such as knowledge, health, and wealth. Wealthy people, for example, are always anxious that others might be using them. And wise people usually long for the bliss of ignorance. Furthermore, we can always find people who are happier than others and this can easily make us fall into despair.

Kant's solution to this problem is, as we saw, to do away with the selfishness of the pursuit of happiness. Kant's social conception of prudence has also a moral side to it and allows room for an unselfish pursuit of happiness. Because, according to another aspect of the social conception of prudence, we need toleration of and cooperation from others in pursuing our ends that comprise our happiness. Therefore, a moral realm of toleration and cooperation, the kingdom of

ends, is conducive to our happiness. We should aim at establishing that happiness and taking our portion of it in proportion to our virtue. The distribution of happiness according to virtue is ensured by the wise will of God. In the moral realm, with divine assistance, our virtue should determine our “worthiness to be happy” (Ak 5:110). The upshot of all this is that we should give up a selfish pursuit of happiness in exchange for our portion of a deserved general happiness.

Kant thinks that deserved happiness is a special form of happiness and is of superior value than what he calls “happiness as only a contingent and external effect dependent on nature”. He expresses this in the following words:

“Happiness is twofold: either that which is an effect of the free choice of rational beings in themselves, or that which is only a contingent and external effect dependent on nature. Rational beings can make the true happiness, which is independent of everything in nature, for themselves through actions that are directed to themselves and reciprocally to each other. And without this, further, nature cannot afford genuine happiness. This is the happiness of the intelligible world [Verstandeswelt]... I must seek on my part to attain the example of perfection in a possible good world. That is good in itself, which does not depend merely on contingent conditions, but on my own will.”( Ak 19:202-3)

Kant clearly distinguishes happiness of the intelligible world that results from the free choice of rational beings from happiness that is merely a gift of nature. The happiness of the intelligible world occurs when we establish reciprocity between our ends and the ends of other rational beings so that our ends not only harmonize with but also advance the ends of others. This happiness results from moral perfection and is therefore good in itself. Furthermore, as the following passage clearly conveys, it is dependant on our free will:

“A certain basis(fount, foundation)of satisfaction is necessary, which no one must lack, and without which no happiness is possible, the rest are accidents...This basis is self-satisfaction(as it were apperceptio iucunda primitiva). It must depend neither on the gift of nature nor on luck and accident, since these need not accord of themselves with our essential and highest ends. Since the satisfaction must be connected with its source necessarily and universally, thus a priori and not merely according to empirical laws, which are never apodictically certain, it must 1. depend on the free will, which we can ourselves make in accordance with the idea of the highest good. 2. this freedom must to be sure be independence from all sensuous necessitation, but yet not altogether without law”(Ak 19:278)

Setting our happiness on our free will is a way to ward off the contingency and

indeterminacy that the selfish pursuit of happiness creates. That is, by being a free (self-legislating) member of the kingdom of ends, we can hope for a *determinate* happiness, which is of great value because it is freely chosen and deserved. That kind of happiness partakes in the value of freedom which is “the inner value of the world” (Ak 27:1482)

Interestingly, to be able to achieve this happiness, one’s primary focus should be not on being happy but rather being worthy of happy. This is what Kant says when he discusses the appropriate answers to the questions a moral trainee must be asked:

“ 5) What does one call the condition in which all the wishes of a human being... are satisfied?- I don’t know- Happiness, because everything like that rests on luck.

6) Could you then be happy in the highest degree but yet dissatisfied with yourself in the highest degree, and why?[No.] Because you are conscious and say to yourself that you are not worthy of this happiness.

7) Can another who makes you happy also make you worthy of happiness, or must it be yourself whose conduct makes you worthy?- I must do it myself.

8) What then must be the first of all your wishes, to be happy or to be worthy of happiness? To be worthy, i.e., to so act that at least I am not unworthy of it.-Since you must do it yourself, thus you are free”(Ak 19:312)

If one is happy but finds himself unworthy of this happiness, he cannot enjoy a complete self-satisfaction. That is why to be worthy of happiness should be the first wish of the moral trainee.

Still, as I have tried to show throughout my thesis, in a realm where everyone aims at being worthy of happiness, general happiness occurs. In other words, although our primary motivation is to be worthy of happiness instead of being happy, we still achieve general happiness. This happens because members of the moral realm value the freedom of each other and respect each other’s capacity to set ends for themselves using their reason. This means that they respect each other’s pursuit of happiness. Furthermore, they *help* each other achieve happiness. Help functions according to the principle of reciprocity. A member of the kingdom of ends may ask for others’ help because he is willing to offer help when others ask for it. Kant discusses this in the following way:

“... a [man], for whom things are going well while he sees that others (whom he could very well help) have to contend with great hardships, thinks: what

is it to me? Let each be as happy as heaven wills or as he can make himself; I shall take nothing from him nor even envy him; only I do not care to contribute anything to his welfare or to his assistance in need! Now, if such a way of thinking were to become a universal law the human race could admittedly very well subsist...but it is still impossible to will that such a principle hold everywhere as a law of nature. For, a will that decided this would conflict with itself, since many cases could occur in which one would need the love and sympathy of others and in which, by such a law of nature arisen from his own will, he would rob himself of all hope of the assistance he wishes for himself”(Ak 4:424)

Here, Kant’s argument is definitely not a prudential argument, which would proceed in the following way: “It is in my *interest* to help others to make them more prone to help me when I am in need”. Rather, the argument that Kant favors is that “to be rationally consistent in asking for help, I should be ready to help others”. The gist of Kant’s argument is best captured when one thinks, “I am not worthier than others. Why should getting help be an exclusive right for me?” At the bottom of Kant’s argument, we find an idea of equality in terms of intrinsic worth- equality in dignity. In the moral realm, thanks to the idea of equality in dignity, everyone contributes to each other’s happiness by helping each other in a reciprocal manner. This does not mean forfeiting the pursuit of one’s own happiness. Pursuing our own happiness is also a duty since if we are unhappy, we are more likely to transgress our duties. Furthermore, as we saw, duty to secure other people’s happiness contributes to our own happiness: once we help others, we can expect their help in return. This is why it is still wiser to contribute to other people’s happiness in cases our happiness would *seem* to be being compromised by helping others.

The normative foundation of the moral realm is, as we saw, the idea of equality in dignity- the idea that we are equal because we all share the rational faculties unique to humanity. According to Kant, to be able to appreciate the idea of equality in dignity, we need to check our drive to claim superior worth over others. As we saw earlier, this drive is most manifest in our selfish pursuit of happiness, which is based on comparative self-love. When we form an ideal of happiness for ourselves, we always want that ideal to be superior to the ideal of others. Kant thinks that such a comparative pursuit of happiness destructs the whole foundation of the moral realm, the kingdom of ends. To be able to bring

about a moral realm, therefore, we should cleanse ourselves of self-conceit.

Kant thinks that we cannot do this in isolation however well disposed we may be. We need to unite in an ethical community and acquire a collective identity in the ethical community. The ethical community, "a union of hearts" fights the grounds of self-conceit by turning us into people who do not find distinctions on the basis of wealth, power and status to be the determining ground of their worth. These distinctions melt away in the recognition of the fact that we are all dignified equals and friends under divine command. This does not only endows us with a collective identity but also has a compelling psychological effect on our effort to have a moral disposition. The social context of evil is therefore removed in the ethical community. In the ethical community, instead of boasting about our distinctions, we cultivate sympathy with others and help them through charity. We discover that we are capable of self-mastery by displaying virtues of social intercourse (politeness) and take a giant step towards virtue. Furthermore, in the ethical community, we get rid of the intellectual servility that arises when clergy or moral teachers monopolize moral knowledge. The idea of equality in dignity therefore motivates us to be author of our own morality. And consequently, we legislate for ourselves the duties of love and respect.

The ethical community contributes to the realization of the ideal of the highest good (general happiness distributed in proportion to virtue) In other words, the exercise of the laws of virtue creates an environment conducive to general happiness. First, laws of virtue allow us to make better use of our inclinations and be happy. Inclination to social enjoyment, for example, can lead us to happiness most reliably when under the guidance of the laws of virtue. Kant gives the example of a dinner party composed of men of taste who enjoy the company of each other, engage in an open exchange of ideas and do not spread evil report about each other(Ak 8:88). This is "civilized bliss" and is preferable to a social event characterized by envy, defamation and ridicule. Secondly, in the ethical community, we do not develop passions that are destructive of our happiness. As we saw, there is no reason to be ambitious about power in the ethical community. Cleansing ourselves of passionate ambition is good as far as our happiness is concerned. This is because if a person is passionately ambitious, he usually ignores whether others hate him for his actions. He, thus, becomes blind to his inclination to be liked by others. Consequently, as others do not like him, he



becomes unhappy. We avoid this in the ethical community, which does not allow the cultivation of passionate ambition. Thirdly, laws of virtue promote toleration of and cooperation from others in the pursuit of happiness. Respect and beneficence among human beings contribute to general happiness. Finally, the ethical community does away with many distinctions (wealth, status, knowledge) that prevent most people from partaking in happiness. For example, in the ethical community, priests cannot enjoy the exclusive happiness that arises from having the monopoly of knowledge. In general, the ethical community is against all criteria other than virtue that may govern the distribution of happiness. All this clearly establishes that without forming an ethical community, we are incapable of discharging the duty to promote the highest good.

A good way to conclude the thesis would be to state how I see the connection between two major Kantian concepts: the good will and the highest good. Kant thinks that we have the duty to have a good will that arises out of pure respect for the moral law. A good will is good in itself. It is not good “because of what it effects or accomplishes, or because of its fitness to attain some proposed end but only because of its volition”(Ak 4:394) Still, a good will pursues the end of attaining the highest good- general happiness distributed in proportion to virtue. It hopes for divine assistance because only God can ensure that happiness is to be distributed according to virtue. In morally corrupt communities, we usually do not concentrate on our capacity to have a good will. Therefore, a social context of a morally reformed (ethical) community is a great contributor to our effort to have a good will. Nevertheless and before all, even when it exists in the midst of moral corruption, a good will always keeps shining “like a jewel by its own light”(394:8)

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