

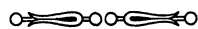
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Kant's Ethics

GERARD SMITH
Marquette University

CHANGE the names of the thinkers of different periods, give a few nuances to the philosophies for which they stand, and the truth in the assertion that history repeats itself becomes apparent. The Epicureans and the Academicians of the pagan world, forgetting the lessons of Plato and Aristotle, had left to men a sad heritage of lawless thought and lawless morals. Carneades defended with equal readiness and skill both sides of questions of justice before an astonished Roman Senate. Epicureans, whistling bravely though tremulously past the graveyards of mortal men, piped their followers through self indulgence to the sickly pastures of self destruction. Against this disarray of thought and morals rose up, mighty in its sternly compact though inhuman strength, the philosophy of Stoicism. There is a law above the State's; reason is its rule; passion, if not its enemy, is, at most, its poor relation and must not demand aught in the home where it has no rightful place. It seemed, as Montesquieu says somewhere in his *Grandeur et Decadence des Romains*, that human nature of itself had striven to produce this worthy sect which was like the plants brought forth by the earth in spots never seen by heaven. For the Academicians and Epicureans substitute the names of Descartes, Bayle, Hume, Locke, Diderot, and you have a fair sample of the eighteenth century soil from which sprang another plant of Stoicism. The modern Sensists too have played havoc with thought and life. English Empiricists were resorting to what J. Barrie would call "hanky-panky" in order

to show how universal knowledge was got from sensation. Associationism was their game, and it is about as useful an explanation of knowledge as it is of a jig-saw puzzle to say that it sees itself. French *libertins* were gaily proffering blasphemies which deserved the bolts of heaven, "if heaven had bolts for blasphemy." And Diderot was trying to prove, behind closed doors, that modesty was against nature. From this new soil, "which heaven has never seen," sprang the new Stoicism of Immanuel Kant.

Yet history is never a servile reedition of the past. Though the old Stoicism and the new agreed upon the necessity of the Absolute, yet the new, improving upon the vagueness of the old, placed this Absolute in self. Reason in both gives the law, but not, as of old, by way of recognizing what the law is; reason now creates the law. Further, though neither Stoicism can unite into one the two roads open to man, the primrose path and the strait and narrow way, and though each thus fails to resolve the difficulty that the good for a sensitive-rational being ought to resolve and so fails, when all is said, to satisfy him, yet each strives in its own way to assure men who are anxious to be both good and happy that somehow things will be well with them if they are only good. Old Stoicism assured man that he was an angel. Kant assures him that he is God. What more could a man ask?

As a reaction against Utilitarianism, which gives no moral rule at all, Stoicism is a swing in the right direc-