

Theories of Human Nature in Spinoza, Vasubandhu, and Feminism

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ABSTRACT

Both Spinoza and Vasubandhu provide accounts of human nature in which the emergence of human potential in any person depends upon facilitating interaction with others in which the person's potential is likewise facilitated. Centredness of self relies on receptiveness and responsiveness to those with whom one interacts so that one's reality is centred in the interactive process. Feminist ethics, described by reference to Nel Noddings, is grounded in a similar kind of theory of human nature, one in which the principle of connectedness overrides the principle of competition. The dialectic between feminist theories of human nature and those of Spinoza and Vasubandhu provides a connection between an ethics of caring and an ethics of principle.

RESUME

Spinoza et Vasubandhu nous présentent tous deux une conception de la nature humaine selon laquelle l'émergence du potentiel humain d'un individu résulte de la facilitation de ses échanges avec d'autres personnes dont le potentiel est, lui aussi, développé. Le moi véritable d'un individu est dépendant de sa réceptivité aux autres et de la façon dont il réagit envers autrui, de sorte que la réalité d'un être s'organise autour du processus d'interaction. L'éthique féministe, si l'on s'en réfère à Nel Noddings, se base sur le même genre de théorie de la nature humaine, d'après laquelle le principe de la connexité est plus important que le principe de la rivalité. La dialectique entre les théories féministes de la nature humaine et celles de Spinoza et Vasubandhu fournit un lien entre une éthique qui a à coeur l'intérêt humain et une éthique de principe.

The main endeavor throughout the history of religious philosophy has been to understand what it means to be a human being in the fullest sense. The process of becoming fully human has been expressed often in terms of the actualization of our true natures—the primary concern has been that of ethical development. In this paper I aim to show that Spinoza, a seventeenth-century Dutch rationalist, and Vasubandhu, a fifth-century Indian yogācāra Buddhist, are two valuable historical sources for feminist approaches to a redefinition of human nature and a more egalitarian ethical theory.

Some feminists question the viability of using historical philosophers as resources for feminist research. There are two main reasons for these skeptical attitudes: (1) philosophers have traditionally not addressed the historical conditions that have contributed to the subordination of women and (2) philosophers have traditionally emphasized male objective rationality at the expense of female subjective emotionality, thereby marginalizing women's interests and activities.

Many great philosophers' works have been selectively analyzed and discussed to give the impression that they were only concerned with topics which were of interest to the interpreters. For example, Spinoza's *Ethics* has been discussed largely in terms of the logical problems within his deductive system of thought. There has been much less analysis of the *Ethics* in terms of the relation between reason and emotion, a relation which is foundational to his account of human nature and his theory of ethics—the topic of the book.¹

In defence of my use of historical philosophers in the development of feminist thought, I wish to point out that an important contribution to be made by feminists is the reinterpretation of historical philosophical approaches, where such reinterpretation is appropriate and helpful. The task for feminists, in regard to historical philosophers, is to select, interpret, and communicate their ideas and theories which have previously been described through methods which have excluded their usefulness for women because they were considered irrelevant to the

interpreters' interests. Feminist methodologies can be applied to historical philosophers in order to use their considerable insights for the benefit of feminist efforts to formulate new theories of human nature. To ignore important historical, holistic philosophical approaches is to impede the development of feminist theory. Feminist hermeneutics reveal new avenues for exploration in historical philosophy.

Spinoza and Vasubandhu did not examine historical, empirical realities and, therefore, their philosophies cannot address the important topic of the historical subordination and marginalization of women. Their usefulness for feminists lies in the connections they make between an ethics of compassion and a metaphysics of interrelatedness in their theories of human nature. Their theories of human nature revolve around the assumption that emotion and reason are inseparable. The combination of being and knowing characterizes self-emergence in the dynamic process of interrelatedness described by Spinoza and Vasubandhu.

The Spinoza-Vasubandhu conjunction is useful because the two philosophers' accounts of self-determination shed light on each other. Spinoza and Vasubandhu are mutually informing on the topics of metaphysics and epistemology as well as in regard to their theories of motivation, the self, and morality—all of which are central to an adequate account of human nature and ethical development. More will be said later in this article to elaborate on the way in which insights from one philosopher contributes to an understanding of the other. For the moment, I will briefly refer to some examples of the ways in which reading Spinoza and Vasubandhu together promote new interpretations of each. I will refer more to Spinoza as he is better known to most Western readers.

Spinoza's metaphysics has most often been discussed in terms of metaphysical determinism, which disallows the possibility of free action. Such an interpretation is mistaken and is largely due to the influence of Western philosophy of religion which emphasizes the immutability of God and, accordingly, the predetermined laws of cause and effect. I propose an alternative interpretation.² Spinoza's *Ethics* is primarily a philosophy of becoming, rather than a philosophy of being. It is about becoming fully human through apprehension of the ontology of connectedness in the dynamic process of emergence. This interpretation of Spinoza's *Ethics* is facilitated by comparison of shared topics discussed in Vasubandhu's *Trīṃśikā*—namely, metaphysics, epistemology, motivation, the self, and freedom. Vasubandhu's doctrine of *pratīyasamutpāda* (interdependent origination) is a metaphysical

doctrine of nondual interrelatedness, similar to Spinoza's account of nature, which is an eternal process of becoming through interaction of historical conditions. Juxtaposing the two philosophies allows the possibility of interpreting Spinoza's metaphysics independent of the notion of pre-determinism and, at the same time, demystifies the Buddhist doctrine of *pratīyasamutpāda*.

Their metaphysics are closely associated with their ethics. Benevolence is the natural basis of ethics, and justice is the conventional basis which is required because trust needs to be formally stipulated in the absence of natural benevolence. Justice has its place in the context of absence of felt ontological interdependency. Obligation, in the views of Spinoza and Vasubandhu, is tied to love through metaphysical interconnectedness. There is no dichotomy between moral obligation and caring for another. Particular personal encounters are explained within the context of universal principles of nonduality. One's obligation is fundamentally to oneself. That obligation is to express the natural drive for the fullest actualization of one's potential. Self-actualization is not, however, an expression of egoism; rather, it is an expression of receptivity and responsiveness to others. It includes awareness of the reciprocal nature of social contexts, which are reflections of ontological interrelatedness.

Benevolence, *i. e.*, concern for the well-being of others, is intrinsic to self-actualization. In fulfilling one's obligation to oneself, one develops an inclusiveness toward others, which is experienced as love for them. Justice is required when there is no basis for receptivity of the other, when fairness is required in the absence of natural benevolence. In an ideal state, justice as a conventional means of fair-mindedness is unnecessary; however, because it is actually impossible to be intimately connected with and care deeply for others beyond a certain limit of relations, justice is a necessary conventional practice. Caring and justice are continuous with each other, reflecting more or less sympathy in one's experience of relatedness. Both caring and justice find their source in the metaphysics of connectedness described by Spinoza and Vasubandhu.

Just as one theory of metaphysics sheds light on the other, Spinoza's and Vasubandhu's epistemologies are mutually illuminating. Both philosophers assume the inclusiveness of reason and emotion in their theories of knowledge. The inseparability of reason and emotion is intrinsic to their views of the ontological connectedness of mind and body. Accordingly, ethics is simultaneously a matter of affective and cognitive awareness. Particular experiences of caring are explained by reference to ontological connectedness. One's epistemological stance pro-

vides a context for one's immediate experience.³ The analysis of Spinoza's epistemology in light of Vasubandhu's similar emphasis on the inclusiveness of cognition and emotion leads to the conclusion that Spinoza's theory of knowledge cannot be appropriately described as rationalist in the strict sense. Ideas are invariably emotively toned. They are ideas of sensations of the body. There is no possibility for the existence of true disembodied ideas which are free of bodily sensation. Emotions are the expressions of the coexistence of ideas and sensations.

Their theories of motivation include the foundational assumption that action is motivated by emotively toned interest. The self, for both philosophers, is a force which is oriented toward actualization through positive interaction with environmental components, including other selves as well as ecological conditions. Personal autonomy requires freedom of expression of the life force of other persons and things. Spinoza and Vasubandhu both contribute their own particular insights to the discussion of these topics, one from the Western rationalist tradition and the other from the Indian *yogācāra* tradition. The interaction of their insights provides a unique and valuable holistic perspective on the study of human nature and self-determination.

Spinoza's and Vasubandhu's mutually informing theories of ethics are valuable resources for feminist moral philosophy and theories of moral agency.⁴ An important contribution of both Spinoza and Vasubandhu is the grounding of ethics in a holistic metaphysics which assumes the inseparability of thought and sensation, manifested invariably as emotively toned consciousness. Virtue, *i. e.*, the expression of one's potential, is explained by references to desire. In neither of the views is the rational will seen as the motivating factor of behavior; and yet both are primarily concerned with ethical conduct. For both Spinoza and Vasubandhu, desire is tied to understanding. Whether an individual is active or passive depends upon both emotion and intellect. There is no possibility in either of the views for virtue to be defined without reference to emotion. Development of personal authority, *i. e.*, one's true nature, is seen to require an inclusive relation between reason and emotion. Personal authority derives from existing in a relational way, based on experiencing the ontology of connectedness. The notion of hierarchical power does not apply to these views of reality. All intention and action is explained by reference to the desire for expression of one's basic nature. One's basic nature is explained in terms of the inextricable relation between ideas and emotions. Indeed, ideas and emotions are understood as two different ways of describing a single phenomenon. The phenomenon is always

understood as a felt experience responded to according to one's understanding of causal interrelatedness. As one apprehends the reality of interdependent causality one responds caringly, without excessive attachment or repulsion. In that way, one is conscious of the essential dependence on all others—one's own power is empowerment through others.

Spinoza⁵

Human nature, in Spinoza's view, is defined in terms of *conatus*: the appetite which motivates one to action. It is the natural tendency to develop one's activities toward one's own happiness. In so far as one is doing that, one is active; otherwise, one is passive. Action is associated with adequate causation and passion with inadequate causative qualities. The relation between inadequate ideas and passions is described as follows: "the more the mind has inadequate ideas, the more it is subject to passive states (*passionibus*)..." (Corollary, Proposition 1, III). Spinoza, however, does not equate emotions with passions or passivity. Emotions tie the sensible impressions of the body to the ideas of the mind and are actions if they are associated with adequate ideas. He posits,

By emotions (*affectus*) I understand the affections of the body by which the body's power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections.

Thus, if we can be the adequate cause of one of these affections, then by emotion I understand activity, otherwise passivity (Definition 3, III).

His "mode-identity thesis"⁶ states that "a mode of Extension [an object] and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two ways" (Scholium, Pr. 7, II). It is an argument for an identity relation between sensible impressions and their corresponding ideas. That thesis is supported by his "substance-identity thesis," which claims that "thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that."⁷ In Spinoza's substance-identity thesis, everything is understood to be a form of activity. Thought and extension are experienced as different modes of activity. Spinoza understands substance to be dynamic matter which involves patterns of qualitative variety rather than fixed forms. The importance of Spinoza's theory of substance here is the use he ultimately makes of it for his theory of ethical development.

Ethical development, for Spinoza, involves intuitive awareness of the pantheistic nature of reality, the dynamic

interrelatedness of what exists. The self is apprehended as a locus of interacting conditions, with a unique perspective on the essentially nondualistic process of emergence. One actively participates in the whole process when one experiences the basic nature of the continually changing patterns of ways of existing, of which one is an essential aspect and through which one is actualized.

Reason is neither the sole nor the primary motivation for action. “We do not endeavor, will, seek after or desire a thing because we judge it to be good, on the contrary, we judge it to be good because we endeavor, will seek after or desire it” (Scholium, Pr. 7, II). Motivation for action, in Spinoza’s view, is explained by reference to active or passive emotion rather than to reason or emotion. Emotion involves both cognition and sensation. He writes,

experience tells us no less clearly than reason that. . . mental decisions are nothing more than the appetites themselves, varying therefore according to the varying disposition of the body. For each man’s actions are shaped by his emotion. . . (Scholium, Pr. 2, III).

For Spinoza, cognition is invariably toned according to one’s emotions. One is always motivated to act according to one’s emotional bias. As one’s emotions become informed, however, they change in kind—from unhelpful to helpful so that one’s conduct becomes more appropriate. All affections are the result of three basic emotions: pleasure (*laetitia*), pain (*tristitia*), and desire (*cupiditas*). Pleasure is “the passive transition of the mind to a state of greater perfection” and pain is “the passive transition of the mind to a state of less perfection” (Scholium, Pr. 11, III). Desire is “appetite accompanied by the consciousness thereof” (Scholium, Pr. 9).

Appetite (*appetitus*) is defined as a person’s essence, the life force (*conatus*), which is related to both the mind and the body and is the end of all our actions (Scholium, Pr. 110 and Definition 7, IV). It is the endeavor to persist according to one’s own nature. Action is the exercise of one’s appetite. The primary emotions constitute the basic motivating force of action.

The will (*voluntas*) is ineffective in the face of affections. Because it is understood as the aspect of the *conatus* that is related to the mind alone—in contrast to appetite which is the *conatus* related to both mind and body (Scholium, Pr. 9, III), the will is powerless to control emotions, which involve both affections and ideas. In view of Spinoza’s identity-thesis it is impossible that the will could exist or function apart from the appetite.

Just as there is no ontological distinction between reason and emotion in Spinoza’s view, there is no actual separation of mind and body. Accordingly, the associations of passive matter with women and of active form with men that are found in Aristotle’s metaphysics⁸ have no place in Spinoza’s thought. This is not to say that Spinoza’s views disallow the possibility of gender-specific implications. My account here merely points out that there is greater likelihood of proceeding along egalitarian lines, using the more holistic approach of Spinoza rather than the dichotomized approach of Aristotle.

Spinoza’s egalitarian ethics are a consequence of his metaphysics. His pantheistic understanding of God as nature is spelled out as a continuously creative situation with neither a beginning nor an end. God (nature) is an eternal process of development. Each individual is a mode of that process. Virtue comes to be equated with the power of expression of one’s essence, *i. e.*, one’s *conatus*; such expression is possible only in conditions of cooperation. One’s power is expressed only in positive conditions. Pain, or lack of power, results from oppressive conditions. Ethical development involves discovering one’s essential nature. That discovery requires understanding the interrelatedness of the natural order, first according to universal principles and then by intuition. That understanding naturally involves agreeable and useful conduct in the societal context, owing to the causal relatedness of things and events.

Self-satisfaction consists in correlating one’s desires with the interests of others. It means having an understanding of the interrelatedness of contextual conditions and deriving pleasure from that understanding, which is a form of self-expression. Pleasure is tied to self-expression. True and adequate ideas of the causal order are required for pleasure. Virtue lies in replacing confused ideas about the nature of things with adequate ideas, thereby transforming passive emotions into active emotions. Active emotions are constitutive of true and adequate ideas, which constitute power or self-expression, *i. e.*, virtue. Virtue involves the realization of one’s essential relatedness in the natural order.

In Spinoza’s view, it is impossible that one can pursue one’s own good at the expense of the good of others. Pursuit of one’s own good follows from a desire for pleasure. Pleasure comes from increased knowledge. Increased knowledge leads to love for others because of understanding causal relations. Love for others, through understanding the relational nature of existing conditions, leads ultimately to love of God—the total relational scene. Conversely, the love of God (the intuitive grasp of the total

context) assists in further love of other human beings. Our basic appetite or desire (*conatus*), which is described as our essence, leads naturally to love of others and of God. He continues:

desire, in so far as it is related to mind, is the very essence of mind (Def. of Emotions 1). Now the essence of mind consists in knowledge (Pr. 111, II) which involves the knowledge of God (Pr. 47, II), without which (Pr. 15, I) it can neither be nor be conceived. So the more the essence of the mind involves knowledge of God, the greater the desire with which he who pursues virtue desires for another the good which he seeks for himself (Proof, Pr. 37).

For Spinoza, having qualities that are good and useful, or performing acts that are so, are natural consequences of understanding causal interrelatedness. Indeed, they are co-extensive with it. In this way knowledge is goodness and ignorance is evil. Knowledge is equated with action, action in turn is equated with power. Power is understood in terms of relatedness rather than domination. Accordingly, Spinoza's philosophy of becoming provides a useful historical source for a feminist, egalitarian theory of ethics.

Vasubandhu⁹

Vasubandhu, like Spinoza, describes human nature by reference to both reason and emotion. In his account of the *ālayavijñāna* (pre-reflective basic consciousness), he describes five constitutive features: (a) rapport (*reg pa*), (b) feeling tone (*tshor ba*), (c) a particular mental orientation (*sems pa*), (d) focus of attention (*yid la byed pa*), and (e) the capacity to understand in a conceptual way (*'du shes*).¹⁰

Rapport refers to the relatedness of subject and object of consciousness. From this point of view, one exists necessarily in a relational mode. There are three aspects to rapport: sense organs (*dbang po*), external objects (*yul*), and the perceptual-cognitive operations (*rnam par shes pa*, *Trimśikā*, p. 15). When these three aspects exist in a satisfactory relation, one's feeling-tone (disposition) is positive.

Feeling-tone is experienced as pleasant (*bde ba*), unpleasant (*sdug bsngal*), and neither pleasant nor unpleasant (*sdug bsngal ba yang ma yin bde ba yang ma yin pa*, p. 17). One's experiences of attachment, repulsion or equanimity are characterized by an emotive tone. The neutrality of equanimity does not mean apathy, rather it indicates a lack of prejudice toward the conditions which exist. A

neutral feeling tone is thought to reflect the experience (*myong ba*) of reality, without evaluative bias, as a flow of consciousness of interacting conditions.

The third basic mental phenonema (*sems pa*) is the

inherent tendency in one to incline attention in one direction or another in reference to the input one experiences. The motivation of the intellect (*yid*) moves the mind toward an objective referent in the manner in which an iron moves by the power of a magnet (p. 18).¹¹

This quality of consciousness eliminates the possibility of indifference to inclination. We are naturally inclined toward various referents and must respond to them.

The capacity to focus one's attention, given a particular attraction, constitutes the fourth basic quality of consciousness (*yid la byed pa*). Attention is paid to certain objects of reference because of the attraction they have for the perceiver. This quality of consciousness has the function of making one's mind return repeatedly to a referent so that it becomes more dominant in the flow of one's consciousness. In the state of consciousness described as basic awareness (*ālayavijñāna*), an object of attention becomes integrated into the flow of consciousness in a neutral way, causing no attachment or repulsion. Attachment or repulsion occurs when one's flow of consciousness is interrupted so that particular objects of attention are given special notice. That is described as the mind "sticking or hanging on to" (*'dzin pa*) an object (p. 16).

Due to the fifth basic characteristic of consciousness (*'du shes*), we experience static images of dynamic reality. We mistakenly come to think that the images (*dmigs*) reflect reality. The conceptualized world becomes the only world we know. When this quality dominates consciousness one has what is usually referred to as an intellectual understanding. An intellectual understanding reflects a distorted view of dynamic patterns of interaction. It is without the felt, holistic experience of the intercausality of existing conditions. Intellectual knowledge is tied to egocentricity and its concomitant factor: arrogance. The rational understanding of universal principles does not constitute true knowledge. One has to go beyond that form of knowledge and experience the process of interrelatedness in an "existential" way, *i. e.*, as a way of being in an interdependent relational pattern of existence. Rational understanding of universal principles comprises a required step on the ladder toward knowledge of the nonduality of interacting patterns. It is, however, only a transitory phase and must be passed through if one is to gain freedom from

negative emotive tone, *i.e.*, misery, which is a necessary quality of a dichotomized consciousness.

The process of achieving wisdom involves overcoming two basic hindrances: attachment to the self as a separate reality (*ngar sems*), and an intellectual understanding of reality (*yul la rnam par rig pa*). As a result of egocentricity and intellectual arrogance, we experience the world aggressively rather than cooperatively. Egocentricity and intellectual distortion are the sources of negative emotions. Negative emotions arise from frustrated expectations due to a lack of awareness of interrelated causality (*prāṭīyasamutpāda*). Vasubandhu claims that enlightenment consists of the development of mental qualities which have a positive emotive tone—such as trust, self-respect, and nonviolence—but which do not lead to attachment. Positive mental qualities develop as one increasingly experiences oneself in a relational way. Such experience depends on development of focused attention, through meditation and study of the sacred teachings of the Buddha. Vasubandhu emphasizes rigorous mental development, while at the same time cautions that mental development is problematic without feeling the experience of interdependence with others. Cultivation of the mind comes to be synonymous with cultivation of positive emotive qualities.¹²

Spiritual enlightenment is considered to be coextensive with ethical conduct; all disruptive mental qualities must be eliminated in the process of spiritual growth. Such disruptive influences are: passionate attachment (*'dod chags*), anger (*khong khro*), arrogance (*nga rgyal*), lack of insight (*ma rig pa*), opinionatedness (*lta ba*), and lack of commitment (*the tshoms*) (p. 39).¹³ Passionate attachment to the self forms the basis for all the other negative mental phenomena. Such attachment is inappropriate because it is based on the mistaken view that the self has a fixed nature. One becomes attached to a static image, which makes it impossible to accommodate oneself to the changing reality that one is. Attachment to an illusion leads to inappropriate expectations which are frustrated. Frustration then characterizes such a person's existence. All subsequent mental characteristics are bound to be inconsistent with a calm mind because anything that is associated with frustration leads to further frustration. Accordingly, for Vasubandhu, spiritual enlightenment involves overcoming attachment and its consequent negative effects. The development of compassion and wisdom through the cultivation of such qualities as confidence, self-respect, nonhatred, diligence and nonviolence is seen to constitute self-expression, that is, the expression of one's experience of being a part of the eternal process of becoming. Vasubandhu has no sense of unilateral causation. Accordingly,

there is no idea of power as domination over another. Power is given to a person through experiencing the mutual creation of ourselves through relationship.

He describes joyfulness as a state of balance that is arrived at through intuitive apprehension of the interdependent relatedness of transitory conditions, including oneself (pp. 88-89). Ultimate awareness provides for peace of mind because there is an understanding of why things occur as they do. One understands the network of causality which promotes a situation of well-being. Since reality is seen wholly as contextual, the sense of self as an independent entity disappears. Egocentricity and the corresponding self-centred modes of relating to others are also removed. Joy, the ultimate quality of existence, reflects personal integration, which is understood as the harmonious interaction of all factors in a given context. Like Spinoza, Vasubandhu claims that wisdom is synonymous with joy and confused knowledge is coextensive with a troubled existence.

Both Spinoza and Vasubandhu claim that one pursues that which gives one pleasure. Spinoza claims that one endeavors to pursue that which gives one pleasure because what gives one pleasure is what promotes one's essential self. It is natural to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Vasubandhu claims that one pursues what interests one, and what interests one depends on the emotive value attached to it. The pursuit of pleasure, in both accounts, is associated with ethical conduct. Ethical conduct is equated with freedom, which is equated with happiness—all are accounted for through the integral relation between ideas and emotions, without reference to an independent rational will. As one's understanding of interdependent causality develops so that it is characterized more by universalism and less by particularism, one's emotions change in kind from disruptive to constructive. Ultimately the notion of universalism is transcended in the experience of connectedness, which is the most complete experience of joy. For both Spinoza and Vasubandhu, the holistic experiential state of joy is a higher form of self-expression than the exercise of rationality. Ethical conduct is not a matter of duty, it is an expression of one's true nature.

We can conclude from this analysis that it is reasonable to (1) define human nature in terms of emotion as well as reason and (2) to understand ethical development as a transition from an uninformed existence characterized by negative emotions to an informed existence characterized by positive emotions. Such a developmental view of human nature involves an integration of mind and body as well as of reason and emotion. Finally, in Spinoza and Vasubandhu one finds an understanding of the power of

self-expression described consistently in terms of power through relations with others rather than power over others. It is this understanding of power that is at the core of feminist ethics.

Noddings¹⁴

Nel Noddings' primary concern is moral agency rather than moral philosophy. She argues that caring, acting on behalf of the other, is fundamental to ethical conduct. Such action derives from a natural impulse. An ethic of caring comes from a natural longing for goodness "rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness" (*Caring*, p. 2). Noddings claims that an ethic of principle, traditional ethics, begins with moral reasoning and is secondary to an ethics of caring, which stems from the disposition toward goodness. Longing for goodness, natural caring, is the universal, subjective core which gives substance to our interest in morality. We have all experienced natural caring and those experiences implicitly guide our behavior as moral beings. She locates the "wellspring of ethical behavior in human affective response" (p. 3) rather than in rational abstractions.

Analysis of moral judgement is one way of discussing the question "What is morality?". An alternative—and preferable—way, according to Noddings, is in terms of moral impulse, natural caring (p. 28). She prefers to discuss morality in terms of moral impulse because all ethical conduct begins with an expression of the ethical ideal, which is defined as "that vision of best self" (p. 80) and is developed "in congruence with one's best remembrance of caring and being cared-for" (p. 94). We diminish ourselves when we act unethically because we are not exercising the vision of our best self, which stresses our relatedness to others. Our sense of obligation, that is, our experience of the imperative "I ought" comes from the

fundamental and natural desire to be and to remain related. To reject the feeling [of obligation] when it arises is either to be in an internal state of imbalance or to contribute willfully to the diminution of the ethical ideal (p. 83).

Obligation is a function of personal interrelatedness rather than of the *a priori* idea of freedom that is the metaphysical foundation of obligation for Kant.¹⁵

Noddings ties self-expression to obligation (pp. 81-90). The ethical ideal, *i.e.*, the vision of the best self, is experienced through the reciprocity of caring for another and being cared for. Our obligation to care is an impulse which is fundamental to our natures as human beings

who are born into a web of reciprocal relations. This network of interdependent relationships means that "relation itself is fundamental in obligation" (p. 87). Because we are human, we feel obligated toward others who are present to us. Response to a feeling of obligation thus constitutes a response to our fundamental being. Self-expression is, in part, expression of our sense of obligation. Authentic self-expression is naturally ethical because it involves caring for others through choosing to respond to our own natural disposition to exist in caring relations. We can choose to express ourselves or we can choose to deny self-expression.

Noddings provides a paradigm of morality which allows for female-oriented ethics to be normative. She, among others,¹⁶ claims that an ethics of caring counterbalances the male-oriented ethics of principle. Noddings claims that the different social realities of the two genders dictate two different ethical orientations: "an ethic of caring arises, I believe, out of our experience as women, just as the traditional logical approach to ethical problems arises more obviously from masculine experience" (p. 8). Studies such as those conducted by Kohlberg and Kramer¹⁷ have based their theories of moral development on studies of males exclusively,¹⁸ using the model of rational justification,¹⁹ and have denigrated female morality because it does not correspond to male morality.²⁰

Noddings, Spinoza and Vasubandhu

Noddings has rightly pointed out that we need an alternative account of ethics which will provide a normative account of female morality; however, according to her claim that humans have a natural impulse to care, Noddings would be committed to holding the view that the ethics of caring is normative for humanity and not solely for women. Her ethics of caring assumes, as do the ethics of Spinoza and Vasubandhu, a view of human nature in which the notion of interrelatedness is central. She states this explicitly in her claim that "my very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality" (p. 51). The view that ethics is tied to a theory of human nature in which receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness are central is a major point of connection between feminist ethics and the ethics of Spinoza and Vasubandhu. In addition, they all claim that emotions are integral to the experience of interrelatedness. Consciousness of oneself presupposes awareness of one's emotional disposition to the other. Ethical conduct is the consequence of receptivity. Noddings' relation between self-expression and ethics is similar to the relation of these elements in both Spinoza and Vasubandhu. They all assert the essential interrelatedness of persons. Our individual expression depends

on input from others, so that we cannot satisfactorily express our own nature without being received by others. Receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness are required to sustain personal power.

Noddings' feminist ethics differs significantly, however, from the ethics of Spinoza and Vasubandhu in that she seems to assume the possible disconnectedness of reason and emotion. She does not integrate concrete emotive experience into the context of rational understanding. There is no adequate, systematic method of relating the particular experience of caring to the larger perspective of human interdependence. Reason and emotion appear to be dichotomized in Noddings' ethics of caring just as they are in the ethics of principle of Kant. Her feminine ethics, therefore, mirrors that which it is reacting against, namely masculine ethics, as represented by Kant. Nonetheless, Noddings contributes greatly to our understanding of ethics by directing attention to the present moment. The ethical individual is primarily concerned with receiving the other in any particular encounter. This is the essence of ethics. This occurs in the ever-present "now." However, such a view of ethics need not repudiate universal principles of interrelatedness and, indeed, cannot if the principle of interrelatedness is applied systematically. An ethics of receptivity and relatedness requires a holistic metaphysical framework for coherence of its own principles. We need governing ethical principles to understand and guide us through our lives of interrelatedness.

In the ethics of Spinoza and Vasubandhu, emotive experiences are integral to rational understanding. There is a mutually inclusive relation between the emotionally laden particular and the rationally conceived general. Dialogue between the holistic approaches of these two philosophers from the past and current feminist approaches provides an opportunity to focus on the immediate experience of caring while, at the same time, showing its connection with the ontology of connectedness. The dialogical consequence is the connection made between a metaphysical account of human nature and caring as the primary attitude. The immediate experience of caring is a component of human nature. It provides a systematic underpinning for ethics. Receptivity to the other is the primary, irreducible intentional mode presupposed by ethical attitudes.

Dialogue between feminism, on the one hand, and the theories of Spinoza and Vasubandhu, on the other, develops a greater consciousness of the integration of immediate experience and general principles of relatedness and receptivity. The contributions of each approach yield a more complete account of the interdependence of the par-

ticular with the universal without sacrifice to either principle. It is a dynamic process of mutually informing. The uninterpreted, raw data is given meaning according to the consciousness of metaphysical intercausality. Every experience of caring is unique and yet it reflects a universal inclination toward receptivity of the other. Spinoza and Vasubandhu emphasize the universality of the nature of personal encounter. Feminists emphasize its particularity. Each view has an important dimension to offer the other. The highest form of self-expression in all these views is joy, intense receptivity.

Joy is experienced invariably as a particular occurrence. When we are conscious, however, that a particular occurrence is an example of universal interrelatedness, its significance for us as individuals is enhanced. Isolation of a particular encounter, on the other hand, reduces its meaning. Feminist ethics correctly focuses on personal encounter. It appears out of focus, however, in so far as it separates the particular from the universal. Dialogue between feminist ethics and the ethics of Spinoza and Vasubandhu may lead to such a holistic theory of human nature in which obligation and caring are inseparable manifestations of self-expression. Both obligation and caring revolve around trust in oneself as a constructive force in the web of inter-connectedness. Such trust entails obligation to oneself. One is obliged to care for oneself, to receive oneself. Such receptivity and caring is naturally extended to others when one experiences oneself as interdependent and empowered by others.

NOTES

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1. Winnifred Tomm. "Spinoza, Hume, and Vasubandhu: The Relation between Reason and Emotion in Self-Development," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Calgary, 1984.
2. For similar interpretations of Spinoza's *Ethics*, see J.G. Van Der Bend, editor, *Spinoza On Knowing, Being, And Freedom*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974; Jon Wetlesen, editor, *Spinoza's Philosophy of Man*. Norway: Universitetsforlaget, 1978; and Jon Wetlesen, *The Sage and the Way: Spinoza's Ethics of Freedom*. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1979.
3. For a useful description of five epistemological orientations among women who were studied by four psychologists, see Mary Field Belenky *et al.*, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.
4. I am indebted to Debra Shogan's paper, "What is 'Feminist Ethics?'" for the division of feminist ethics into three categories: "(1) as the basis of the feminist political movement, (2) as the moral agency of individual female lives, and (3) as the work of feminist moral philosophers" (p. 1). Her paper was presented at the Canadian Women's Studies Learned Society meeting, June 6, 1986, Winnipeg, Manitoba. In this paper, I do not discuss ethics as a basis for the feminist political movement; however, I agree that feminist ethics entails a political orientation and forms the basis for political action.

5. The discussion of Spinoza's views here is based on Samuel Shirley, translator, and Seymour Feldman, editor, *The Ethics and Selected Letters*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1982.
6. See Jonathan Bennet, "Spinoza's Mode-Identity Thesis," *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 78, October 1981, pp. 573-583.
7. Scholium, Pr. 7, II. For a good discussion of Spinoza's "substance-identity thesis," see Robert Beck, "The Attribute of Thought," and William J. Edgar, "Continuity and the Individuation of Modes in Spinoza's Physics," in James B. Wilbur, editor, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Essays in Critical Appreciation*. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1976.
8. See, for example, Aristotle's *Politics*, 1254b1, 12. Also his *Generation of Animals*, Bk. I, Sect. II, 716a; Bk. I, Sect. XXI, 729b; Bk. II, Sect. I, 732a; Bk. IV, Sect. I, 766a; and Bk. IV, Sect. III, 767b. In those passages he claims that the relation between the sexes is like the relation between the ruler and his subjects. The reason for the hierarchical relation between the sexes is that females are really deformed males and consist in matter which require the male principle of movement for development.
9. The views of Vasubandhu which are represented here are taken from my translation from the Tibetan of his *Triṃśikā* as found in Sthiramati's *Triṃśikā-bhāṣya*, Enga Teramoto, editor. Kyoto: Association for Linguistic Study of Sacred Scriptures, 1933.
10. For an extensive discussion of the mental phenomena discussed in the *Triṃśikā* see Herbert V. Guenther and Leslie S. Kawamura, translator, *Mind in Buddhist Psychology* by Ye-shes rgyal-mtshan. Emeryville, California: Dharma Publishing, 1975.
11. *sems pa ni sems mngon par 'du byed pa yid gYo bar byed pa ste/ gang yod na khab long gi dbang gis lcags gYo ba bzhin du dmigs pa la sems gYo bar byed pa'o.*
12. Verses 10d, 11a,b,c, and corresponding commentary, pp. 33-38.
13. Verses 11d, 12a.
14. Nel Noddings. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
15. Immanuel Kant. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translator, James W. Ellington, Section 389. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981.
16. For example, Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982; Susan Sherwin, "Towards a Feminist Approach," *Canadian Women Studies Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 1985, pp. 21-23; and Debra Shogan, "An Analysis of Care and Its Role in Moral Education," presented to the C.A.F.E. Learned Society Meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, June 3, 1986. For good discussions of feminist ethics which include the dialectical approach between an ethics of principle and an ethics of personal interconnectedness, see Genevieve Lloyd, "Reason, Gender, and Morality in the History of Philosophy," *Social Research*, Vol. 50, No. 3 Autumn 1983, pp. 490-513; Sandra Harding, "Is Gender a Variable in Conceptions of Rationality?," *Dialectica*, Vol. 36, No. 2-3 (1982), pp. 225-242; Dawne McCance, "Ethics in Postmodern Perspective," presented at the CSSR Learned Societies meeting, Winnipeg, Manitoba, June 5, 1986; and Annette C. Baier, "What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?," *Nous*, Vol. XIX, No. 1, March 1985, pp. 53-63.
17. Lawrence Kohlberg and R. Kramer. "Continuities and Discontinuities in Childhood and Adult Moral Development," *Human Development*, Vol. 12, 1969, pp. 93-120; and Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stages in Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education" in C.M. Beck, B.S. Crittenden, and E.V. Sullivan, editors, *Moral Education: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.
18. See Richard H. Hersh, Diana Pritchard Paolitto, and Joseph Reimer, editors. *Promoting Moral Growth: From Piaget to Kohlberg*. New York: Longman, 1979. "Kohlberg's original research dealt with boys aged ten through sixteen," p. 65.
19. Hersh, et al., pp. 65-81. The six stages of moral development are: (1) first step beyond egocentrism, a pre-conventional level of reasoning; (2) still pre-conventional but is more advanced, involves the standard of fairness; (3) conventional level of moral reasoning, third-person perspective of significant others, emphasis on intimate personal relations; (4) third-person perspective applied more generally to society, law emerges as a central value; (5) understands relativity of values but seeks to connect relative evaluations to universal principles; (6) Kant's moral autonomy, integration of one's ethical ideals with universal principles (pp. 65-81).
20. Kohlberg and Kramer observe that when college men and women are compared, using the six-stage model of moral development, there are significantly more women than men at stage 3. They conclude that "Stage 3 personal concordance morality is a functional morality for housewives and mothers; it is not for businessmen and professionals" (p. 108).

A Man's Home Is His Castle

The point is
 the top of a spire —
 the sharp end of your elaborate
 castle of the ego! Listen —
 I am tired of the stong religious whiteness
 of your elevated structure,
 of the gutless rituals within.
 In fact, I like rain dripping
 from gutterless corners,
 wind reaching its cool fingers
 through two-by-fours, fire burring
 on the floor of my fish house! I like
 my lucid, inflated, and unrequited ability
 to be cut by the thorn in your steeple.
 Only people who geomance,
 dance utterly without technique,
 fish for self-distortions, and
 indulge in a wealth of blood
 are admitted here.

" I hurt"
 is the sign on my door.
 Quite unlike
 " I'm a man"
 on your's.

Nancy Wallace
 Maine