

2012

Spinoza and Virtue: The Significance of Habituation to a Virtuous Character to the Ethics of the Ethics

Bobbie Sue Schindler
Portland State University

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/mcnair>

Recommended Citation

Schindler, Bobbie Sue (2012) "Spinoza and Virtue: The Significance of Habituation to a Virtuous Character to the Ethics of the Ethics," *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 10.
[10.15760/mcnair.2012.36](https://doi.org/10.15760/mcnair.2012.36)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

Portland State University McNair Research Journal 2012

**Spinoza and Virtue: The significance of habituation to a virtuous character to the ethics of the
*Ethics***

by
Bobbie Sue Schindler

Faculty Mentor:
Angela Coventry

Citation: Schindler, Bobbie Sue. Spinoza and Virtue: The significance of habituation to a virtuous character to the ethics of the *Ethics*. Portland State University McNair Scholars Online Journal, Vol. 6, 2012: pages [36-49]

Spinoza and Virtue: The significance of habituation to a virtuous character to the ethics of the *Ethics*

By bobbie sue schindler
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Angela Coventry

Introduction

Although scholars disagree on the specific kind of ethical theory in Spinoza's work, they agree that there is a connection between certain types of knowledge and one's ability to live the good life.¹ Specifically, it is in how one is to move toward control of their emotions that the connection between knowledge and ethics, or the good life, becomes clear. The connection is made by understanding that, dependent on what type of knowledge one is operating on, one can move closer, or further away, from control of their emotions and a human perfection where the good life is to be achieved. Spinoza's method to achieve control over one's emotions, much like the modern practice of psychotherapy, asserts that through knowledge of one's own emotions coupled with knowledge of the world one finds herself in, one can move toward a self-determined character where one acts and does not react. Becoming purely active and self-determined occurs by the development of virtuous states of character in a movement through Spinoza's hierarchy of knowledge where one obtains the highest form of knowledge: intuitive knowledge. In a state of pure activity based on intuitive knowledge, one becomes the free person and lives with a sense of eternal blessedness, a non-transitory joy. In this state, human perfection and the good life are to be found.

Achieving Spinoza's perfected human state of eternal blessedness, or becoming the free person, is a challenging and uncommon thing to achieve.² Though Spinoza is famously explicit in saying the model is 'difficult and rare' to achieve, it still is an achievable goal and not merely an optimal ethical placeholder (5P42S).³ While Spinoza claims that becoming the free person is a rare but achievable goal, he also seems to claim that it is one achievable by anyone who sets themselves toward it: "The greatest good of those who seek virtue is common to all, and can be enjoyed by all

¹ This is seen in the disparate interpretations in Aloni (2008), Curley (1973), Garrett (1996) and Rosenthal (2001)., Curley likens Spinoza's system to a sort of deontology (although he uses the term hortatory ethic) and Garrett makes the claim that his work can align with a sort of deontology, consequentialism, emotivism and virtue ethics. Others see that Spinoza's work belongs to virtue ethics (Rosenthal) or a *eudaimonistic* ethical theory (Aloni). To note: this work is inspired by my own reading of Spinoza as a type of virtue ethicist, and this work is part and parcel to understanding that interpretation.

² To note: 'Eternal Blessedness' and the 'free person' are connected, in my opinion, but not synonymous as this sentence may seem to make them. The sense of blessedness one achieves comes by way of the intellectual love of God that arises from acting by intuitive knowledge, which is virtue itself (5P42). The intellectual love of God, which arises from intuitive knowledge is eternal (5P33) and blessedness consists of the mind's perfection (5P33S), thus implying that one who has this eternal blessedness has achieved a perfected mind and would model the ideal free person who operates via intuitive knowledge. Spinoza does state that 'blessedness' is something that one can enjoy the more one uses intuitive knowledge, thus implying that it is not necessarily something constant (5P42). Although he states earlier: "From this we clearly understand wherein our salvation, or blessedness, or freedom, consists, namely, in a constant and eternal love of God..." (5P36S), which contestably requires one's intellectual love of God to be something constant, but more importantly this statement aligns one's *freedom* with one's *salvation* and/or *blessedness*. If one were to achieve this difficult 'salvation', being free from control of the emotions and feel a constant intellectual love of God, as I understand what salvation would consist in for Spinoza (by 5P36S), then this would entail becoming the free person. Spinoza, in 5P42, never explicitly states that free person is the one who has eternal blessedness, however I believe it can be adequately inferred, as the free person is the ideal who acts from intuitive knowledge naturally and constantly, as opposed to the person of reason who must 'work' to be free, or experience a sort of freedom. This distinction between the person of reason and the free, or intuitive, person is more clearly dealt with later in the paper.

³ Herman DeDijn promotes this position, claiming that without importance being put on intuitive knowledge, and without the realization of the free person, the *Ethics* cannot be fully realized. Further, stating that without [becoming] the free person who uses intuitive knowledge that one is stuck with the sorrows of reason. "Indeed, victory over the passions seems to require a *development* in our knowledge that goes beyond the sort of knowledge of the rational man talked about in *Ethics* IV." (p. 39).

equally." (4P36). The greatest good is found in a knowledge of God that drives one's activity, leads one to become the free person, and to experience eternal blessedness (5P25, 5P42). This example illustrates a tension of the *Ethics*: the greatest good is to be found by all who seek this virtue in the proper manner, but only a few who seek this virtue in the proper manner will achieve the greatest good. However, after careful examination there is no tension to be found, as I will show, because Spinoza transitions from what he terms the 'greatest good' regarding knowledge from reason, in Part Four, to intuitive knowledge, in Part Five. In this change of what underlies the greatest good Spinoza seems to split his *Ethics*, or ways in which one *is* ethical through her use of virtue, into two parts. One, in which the ethical behavior only occurs by means of a sort of struggle and a practice to make that struggle, one's bondage to the emotions, easier to navigate, which thus increases one's happiness over sadness. In the second part, ethical behavior, or virtue, simply exists and is produced naturally or seemingly effortlessly, as is seen in the free person, who is in a constant state of joy.

The problem addressed in this work is how one can become the free person who only, or primarily, lives by intuitive knowledge. I argue that it is so near impossible or that so few could obtain having a perfected intuitive knowledge that in advocating one's ability to achieve this ideal Spinoza creates a model of ethical behavior that is far outside his audience's reach. Further, focusing on this goal of the *Ethics*, or in seeing that the ethics of *Ethics* is only fully realized through becoming the free person, diminishes the value of the pragmatic ethics found in habituation to the virtuous states of character of *tenacity* and *nobility*.⁴ The goal of this work is to highlight that Spinoza's conception of the free person should be seen as a guide in one's virtuous activity, and that the genuine realizable good life is to be found in the person of reason's development and practice of *tenacity* and *nobility*.⁵ Thus, habituations to certain states of character are of prime importance to the ethics of the *Ethics*.

To defend my thesis I first provide a glimpse of Spinoza's *Ethics* and what concepts or propositions form the foundation of this discussion. Next, I will discuss the link between the types of behavior one produces, how free, or self-determined, a person is, with Spinoza's types (or account) of knowledge.⁶ After understanding these positions or relations, and what constitutes them, through Spinoza's propositions, I will discuss the problem of achieving a perfected intuitive state, or becoming the free person, as well as the aforementioned tension of Spinoza seeming to claim that the virtuous state of the free person is something that can be common, or achievable, to all who set themselves toward it. Part of the goal of this work is to illustrate why it is that a fully realized intuitive 'state' is difficult to obtain, thus making it only achievable for the rare few and not the many, as one would hope an ethical model would be set to accomplish. Another, goal of this work is to highlight the importance of habituation to Spinoza's system and to illustrate that the ethics of the *Ethics* need not be realized in the end goal of the free person, but in the process of working toward that goal by use of reason. What is important in realizing the ethics of the *Ethics* is to use reason to habituate and then practice certain states of character.

⁴ The pragmatic goal, as mentioned earlier, is in the sort of psychotherapy that occurs as a part of practice of habituation to *tenacity* and *nobility*. While many scholars have illustrated Spinoza's connection to the modern practice of psychology/psychotherapy, such as Curley (1988), De Dijn (2004) and Jarrett (2007), there are also those who practice and promote it such as Dr. Donald Robertson (2009). In addition to psychotherapy, there are those who see the contemporary benefit in Spinoza's ethics, such as Aloni. His paper sets out to show how conceptions from Spinoza's eudaimonistic ethical system can create the foundation for an "empowering and liberating pedagogy".

⁵ Certainly, for Spinoza, the good life is to be found in the person of reason as well as the free person. However, what will be shown later is that the good life that the person of reason experiences is only a modicum of what would be experienced by the free person and that 'true virtue' can only exist in the free person.

⁶ This idea developed by reading Garrett, "...certain kinds of *behavior* become more prevalent as one becomes more free—that is, they vary proportionately with freedom. They do so because they are products of human virtue and the use of reason, each of which renders us relatively more free, more able to act from our own nature rather than be determined by external causes." Added emphasis. (Garrett, 1996, p. 289)

Casual Determinism and Virtue

Spinoza defines virtue in the Fourth Part of the *Ethics*⁷ in the following:

“By virtue and power I understand the same things, that is (by 3P7), virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power to bring about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone.” (4D8)

At first glance this definition of virtue leaves something to be desired. Acting by one's own nature seems to be the sort of thing people naturally have the power and inclination to do, given a free will. For Spinoza, there is no such freedom and like many of his terms one must understand this conception of virtue within the context of his philosophical system. Specifically, one must understand virtue within his account of causal determinism and our human bondage to fortune and the emotions.

In part one of the *Ethics*, one learns what Garrett calls a central feature of nature for Spinoza, which is the relationship between Nature (God)⁸ and all individual things, or the division between substance and modes: “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.” (1P15) (Garrett, 1996, pg. 270). The implications of this are that people have a direct and intimate relationship not only with Nature, but also with all things that exist in Nature. This relationship means that one's actions can be conceived as being an expression of Nature, but also that one can have a direct natural way of participating in the divine. From one's intimate link to Nature comes Spinoza's necessitarianism, which claims everything that has occurred since the very first cause, Nature, has unfolded in a determined manner and those things as they are, or have been, could not have occurred in any other way (1P29). This view is the basis for Spinoza's causal determinism. To be free is to be the sole cause of one's actions or existence and by this only Nature can be truly free (1D7), as Nature is the first and continuing cause of everything. People, as with all other things, are not free, or do not have a free will, and every person's mind is determined by prior causes (2P48). As he rejected the Cartesian idea of an infinite free will, he also rejected Descartes' mind-body dualism. Spinoza parallels modes of thought to modes of extension, which entails the anti-dualist conception of the identity of the mind to the body (2P7S). This move by Spinoza also naturalizes a person's affects (emotions) by making their occurrence identical to corresponding states of the body. This naturalization of one's emotions is important to note as one will find that emotions will have a direct bearing on the ability, or inability, to be active in the world or to be free. It is in this active movement to be free that one will find Spinoza's concept of virtue.

One's ability to experience some sort of freedom, or to act over being passive, relates to adequate/inadequate ideas and adequate/inadequate causation. Adequate ideas are defined as an idea that excludes external things in its understanding and has a clear and true understanding of its object in itself (2D4). Inadequate ideas are those that are confused or not fully and clearly known. Passions, or passive emotions, rely on confused or inadequate ideas, in which one does not fully understand why she feels the way she does or why she is 'acting' a certain way. One can only be said to be active, or the author of one's actions, when they use adequate ideas (3P3). One must understand adequate/inadequate causation through the essential piece of Spinoza's *Ethics*, the conatus. The conatus is simply each singular thing's striving to persevere in their being (3P6) and this striving is the essence of each individual thing (3P7). A thing can only be active when it is the adequate cause of effects using, or through, its own nature when it clearly and distinctly understands the effects. Further, it is passive when it is the inadequate, or partial, cause of effects of things through its own nature (3D2). In addition, being active is in direct relation to furthering

⁷ I use the Curley's (1994) translation of the *Ethics*.

⁸ God and Nature are synonymous for Spinoza; as God is simply the first cause, and complete eternal infinite totality and creation of, Nature. I will use Nature in this essay over God.

one's own perseverance, *conatus*, whereas in being passive one cannot further their perseverance. When a person is aware of their striving, in mind and body, and moves toward specific things that will aid in promoting, or furthering, her striving, this awareness is known as the affect (emotion) of desire. Other affects that directly relate to the promotion, or hindrance, of one's striving are joy and sadness and their derivative emotions. Joy and sadness are defined as those things that increase (joy) or decrease (sadness) one's activity and/or capacity for perfection (3P11S).⁹ It is important to note that there are varying degrees and types of joy and sadness, but that of all the emotions one may experience can be related to joy, sadness, or desire. In turn these can be related to one's activity or passivity.

A person's activity or passivity comes down to her relationship to external causation. External causes can be understood as those things that compel or constrain one's actions in this or that way. They are essentially anything of which an individual cannot be said to be the adequate cause, or author. One can see it as fortune (or luck/happenstance), as in other people's actions or perhaps the events from a natural disaster. External causes also are the passions, which when not understood, go unchecked and lead one passively to act rather than acting from knowledge of the cause and oneself as the cause. These external causes, whether they are fortune or passions, are always looming. One's *conatus* (or striving) can, and will be, always subject to the force of the external causes (4P3). While clearly one cannot have control over other people or the events of Nature's unfolding, it seems that they can have control over their emotions and their actions from these events. Both the Stoics and Descartes thought that people could have absolute control over the passions¹⁰, but Spinoza claims one is always subject to them—one can only do their best to 'accommodate' oneself to them (4P4C). It is in this idea where one finds his account of human bondage to external causation as expressed in one's bondage to the passions.

It is important to notice the intimate relationship between virtue and the *conatus*, as virtue is nothing other than acting by the laws of one's own nature (self-determination) and one's striving to preserve in her being (*conatus*) can only be furthered by the laws of one's own nature. Spinoza states that the *conatus*, or one's striving, is the first and only foundation of virtue and that without it one could not conceive of virtue, or virtuous activity (4P22C). It is in the ability to use one's power, or virtue, that one finds the cause of her happiness. When one considers her power of acting she feel joy, or some variation of it, and feels this joy the more she imagines her power of acting, and/or being praised (3P53, P53C). One should remember that the happiness one feels from her power of acting is not just in the action itself, but in what was necessary for it to occur. Namely, this happiness is in one's knowledge of the necessity of all causes relating back to, and being a part of, the first cause Nature. When one thinks about the awesomeness of the totality of the Universe, and oneself within it, actively [self-] determining new causal chains, a person feels a certain type of joy. In this one can see how it is that Spinoza claims we do not need anything else to cause the desire to be virtuous in his sense of the term: "...we ought to want virtue for its own sake, and that there is not anything preferable to it." (4P18S)

The requirements for virtue are in understanding one's determined nature, one's bondage to external causation and obtaining adequate knowledge. Acting from virtue is nothing other than participating in a certain way of living by the guidance of reason¹¹ from the basis of seeking one's own advantage (4P24). In this one must understand the mind as the proximate cause, or that the

⁹ When discussing the emotions the terms *affects* and *passions* are used by Spinoza and I tend to use all three: *affects*, *passions* and emotions. However, it should be noted that an affect can be understood as an active emotion—one that is clearly, or adequately known, and can be related to a person's activity, or being free. Whereas, a passion is understood as a passive emotion, where one doesn't know its cause clearly and is passive to the 'pull' or force of the emotion.

¹⁰ Spinoza notes this in 5Pref, "...the Stoics thought that they depend entirely on our will, and that we can command them absolutely" and referring to Descartes' position, "...since the determination of the will depends only on our power, we shall acquire an absolute dominion over our passions, if we determine our will by firm and certain judgments..."

¹¹ The guidance of reason will be further explained in the next section through the prescriptions of reason.

thing and/or effect must be understood by one's mind clearly and distinctly to be an action, or exercise of virtue (4P23). If not, one is acting passively. This conception of virtue promotes and insists upon knowledge and understanding as a basis to move toward a way of living that promotes the flourishing of the individual and community alike. This can be seen in what Spinoza claims reason strives the most for, understanding (applied knowledge), as it is the most useful thing to reason (4P26). One cannot act without understanding (3P3). Understanding promotes acting toward one's advantage, or one's striving, and this is virtue itself. Thus, understanding becomes the foundation for virtue (4P26). The greatest knowledge, or understanding, we can have is knowledge of Nature. It is natural that knowledge of Nature is the greatest good as Nature contains everything and everything true,¹² so one's greatest virtue is to understand Nature (4p27). For Spinoza, this greatest good is not something lofty of which few can have understanding, but is something that can be enjoyed by all people (4P36). The more that a person comes to understand Nature and seek out virtue the more virtuous she becomes and the more it is that she wants to share this joy with others (4P20, 4P37). It is in one's, "...desire to do good¹³ generated in us by our living according to the guidance of reason, I call morality."(4P37S)

Thus far his account of virtue seems solely egoist, and largely it is. However, Spinoza claims it is ridiculous to think that a person could move to a greater perfection on her own. The individual mind alone does not, and will not, provide one with all that she needs to survive and thrive. All individuals need other things and people to do this. In one's seeking to thrive, or flourish, reason dictates that one seek out those things which agree with one's nature, or are not contrary to it, to aid in promoting one's advantage. What is most useful to people are other people and specifically other people who use reason (4P18S, 4P35). What would be ideal, considering this, is that all people agreed in natures, or were rational, so that all could join together, to form one whole, which worked toward a common advantage.¹⁴

It has been established that people exist as singular things in an infinite chain of causation bound by external causation to act in determinate ways and one must work to understand how it is that she can experience some sort of freedom via her virtuous activity. Spinoza seems to offer two avenues for one to move toward experiencing this freedom, and hopefully a perfected human state where this sense of freedom is constant. The first, is in the prescriptions of reason (4P18S), in which one is guided through reason's demands so that she may increase her power of acting through understanding some guiding precepts. The second, and intimately linked to the first, is in the power of the mind over the affects (5p10S, 20S), where methods of habituation that utilize reason's precepts are given. Specifically, through knowledge of oneself, and through habituation to ways of thinking or ordering one's thoughts, a person can moderate the emotions and their power over them. Both of these methods to virtue, or freedom, look to the model of the free person as a height of human excellence and use the two strengths of character, *tenacity* and *nobility* toward this goal. In the next section, I will explain, through the three types of knowledge and the behaviors or actions that occur by their use, *tenacity* and *nobility* and their application in moving toward becoming the free person.

Three types of knowledge and virtuous actions

¹² If one knows, or has, some knowledge of Nature, then that would constitute an adequate or true idea.

¹³ Good is defined in 4D1, "By good I shall understand what we certainly know to be useful to us." But good (and evil) is also understood more clearly in 4P27, "We know nothing to be certainly good or evil, except what really leads to understanding or what can prevent us from understanding." In this one can see our desire to do good in our aiding others in their striving through understanding (knowledge), or in our friendship creating joy which aids them in being active toward understanding.

¹⁴ This ideal is more completely treated in the *Theological Political Treatise* relating to the ideal state, a perfected democracy.

In understanding the three types of knowledge in Spinoza's hierarchy it is important to note a difference between understanding the definitional sense of the types of knowledge and the behaviors that are produced as a result. In the proceeding I will first briefly explain the definitions of the three types of knowledge, then move to a discussion of their relation to virtuous activity.¹⁵ First in this hierarchy, and the only cause of falsity, inadequate or confused ideas, is opinion or imagination, which is based on such things as reading, remembering, and forming ideas of things from random experience. The second type is reason, which is based on an understanding of the common properties of things. Knowledge connected to reason can be found in principles in common in mathematics, or universal notions (2P40S1), but generally reason is certain ideas that are common to all people (2P38C). It is in understanding the general properties of things that one can move to knowledge of the specifics that fallout from the body of common knowledge. Knowledge of specifics occurs when one has amassed a large body of adequate knowledge based on reason and can deduce adequate knowledge about singular things from the universals found in reason (2P47S). Knowledge of the specifics is unique to the third type, intuitive knowledge, which "...proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal] essence of things." (2P40S2)¹⁶ Intuitive knowledge consists in having a certain body of adequate knowledge (ideas) of Nature (the universe and its workings) so that one can naturally infer, or intuit, other adequate ideas about the properties (essences) of related things. Moreover, by understanding the essences, or specifics, of things as they pertain to Nature, knowledge of what will follow from those things becomes clear, so that one can operate from knowledge of the cause, starting with Nature and Nature's attributes, to knowledge of the effect. In this way one's knowledge as a finite mode can resemble the intellect of Nature, or the causal structure of Nature's intellect (Garrett, 2010, Pg. 113-114).

Most people operate by the first type of knowledge, or have a tendency to fall into the types of behavior associated with the first type of knowledge. According to Spinoza, the first kind of knowledge leads to a slew of problems based upon on inadequate ideas, such as superstition, false religious understandings, sadness and passivity. This type of knowledge is based solely on what one perceives either through hearing, reading or seeing, but the investigation ends at perception. When one operates this way one merely takes things at face value, assuming largely that 'that is just the way it is' or 'that luck made things occur this way', not realizing that there is a cause for the way things are nor seeing things as necessitated by the cause, as in the case of adequate knowledge. Due to ignorance, or inadequate ideas, the person is necessarily passive to the world. She awaits happenstance and does not pursue a deeper understanding of Nature or herself (her emotions). Things simply are because that is the way they are, or things are true because she, without further investigation, takes things told, taught or read to be true. In this one does not reflect upon things or events with reason; one makes uninformed decisions or judgments, behaves and reacts without thinking, and often defaults to superstitions and assumptions for answers or comfort. An example may be that one is often angry, depressed and irritable and she simply assumes this is her given disposition: "well, this is just the way I am and I can't change". Yet, if one reflected upon this through reason she may be apt to find the cause of her disposition, such as in a physiological disorder (chemical imbalance or thyroid problem) or perhaps understanding certain things to be 'triggers' for their behavior. If the latter, by use of reason through understanding the cause of their anger one can separate the idea of the external cause of their

¹⁵ Providing an adequate picture of Spinoza's account, or hierarchy, of knowledge is a formidable task, one I will not tackle here. It will be my task to explain as much as is needed to satisfy a sketch of an understanding for the purposes of the discussion here. For more on this topic look to: Garrett (2010), Steinberg (2009), Wilson (1996).

¹⁶ Diane Steinberg in "Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics" points to the fact that there is some scholarly disagreement whether or not intuitive knowledge is based solely on knowledge of 'particulars'. (Steinberg, Pg. 154) Further, Garrett claims that while universals, or common things, are related to reason and particulars to intuitive knowledge that intuitive knowledge is not limited by, or to, knowledge of particulars (Garrett, 2010, Pg. 110). Lastly, Curley in *Behind the Geometrical Method* claims that intuitive knowledge, or knowledge of God, should be broadly understood as scientific knowledge (Curley, Pg. 125). This should show enough how difficult it is to adequately understand Spinoza's concept of intuitive knowledge.

anger to first reduce the passion, then work to avoid or rid oneself of that particular external trigger.¹⁷ However, if a person only operated by this first type of knowledge no such 'work' or 'therapy' would occur to the individual.

Reason, by definition,¹⁸ operates in how one can see things generally as related to one another, as a part of the larger scheme of Nature, and make practical inferential assumptions and actions based upon this relation.¹⁹ However, what defines the person of reason, or rational person, is her actions amidst the struggle against external causation and/or the passions. In contrast to the person who operates by the first type of knowledge, the rational person seeks to understand the causes of the effects that she experiences in the world. In seeking to understand these causes, one gains knowledge, which allows her to make relational inferences about things in Nature, including one's own and other's behavior. It is not simply the relation between things or events in Nature, but the relation of those things that are viewed as good or bad in relation to one promoting her striving and/or freedom (De Dijn, pg.47). One necessarily forms notions of good and bad corresponding to how something will move her toward, or away from, the ideal free person, which one also necessarily forms in their struggle against external causes (4Pref.). The free person is the ideal one wants herself to become, a model of a perfected human nature, guided by an understanding of Nature and oneself within Nature.

It is in the rational person's desire to become the ideal that the use of the fictions of good and bad come into play through the prescriptions of reason. The rational person is at the mercy of external causation and/or the passions, yet she has her own precepts of reason to aid her through reflection, or use of the imagination (5P10S). The prescriptions of reason state that reason demands that one loves herself, seeks out what useful things will promote her obtaining a greater perfection and that one strives to persevere in their being, or seek one's own advantage, as much as one can (in this) (4P18S). With the understanding that good and evil are not intrinsic to objects or events (4Pref.), but rather to how one is affected either with some variation of joy or sadness (passage to a greater or lesser perfection 3P11S), coupled with the awareness that these affects are related to the promotion or hindrance of one's striving, or one's understanding (4P27), can the moral implications be seen. The activity of virtue occurs by use of one's reason in which one acts in such a way that promotes her own, or others', advantage. This is displayed in Spinoza's two central strengths of character: *tenacity* and *nobility* (3P59S). Both of these strengths of character can be said to be the foundation for all actions which occur insofar as one understands. Moreover, *tenacity* and *nobility* can only be linked to one's activity and not to passivity or partially authored actions. Due to *tenacity* and *nobility* only being linked to understanding, or adequate ideas, a person cannot be called virtuous who acts based upon the first type of knowledge. *Tenacity* is the sort of action one does from the dictate of reason when promoting one's own advantage. Spinoza gives the examples of moderation, sobriety, and presence of mind in danger as virtuous actions relating to *tenacity*. *Nobility* comes about as one strives from the dictate of reason to aid others and/or to join with them in friendship, which can be seen in the given examples of courtesy and mercy.

5P10S states that, "So long as we are not torn by affects contrary to our nature, we have the power of ordering and connecting the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect." From this power one has to order and connect the affections of the body; one can also make it so they are not easily affected by negative emotions. It is in this that one can see how the rational person's practice of *tenacity* and/or *nobility* comes into play. The person of reason, in not having a perfect knowledge of her emotions, is to operate using certain rules or maxims relating to her own striving, which will help guide her. Further, one should not only continually practice these in

¹⁷ This being an example of using propositions or components of Spinozistic therapy as explained in 5P20S (5P2, 5P4S, 5P10S).

¹⁸ By Spinoza's earlier definition.

¹⁹ "Spinoza regards reason as a cognitive inferential process by which adequate knowledge is derived from other adequate knowledge." (Garrett, 1996, pg. 295)

specific events in one's life, but also imagine events which may occur so that when they do, or something similar, she will be prepared to deal with them in the best way possible, or in the most virtuous manner. Spinoza gives us the example of the maxim of life that hate is to be conquered by love, or *nobility* (4P46). So, the rational person is to think of the common wrongs that people do and think how one would respond with *nobility* in mind then one is more apt to be virtuous when these occurrences appear. Jarrett provides an example of how the rational person would respond to feelings of anger due to being tailgated on the highway (Jarrett, pg.164-165). It perhaps is natural to be angry and in these situations people often tend to respond negatively in ways that result in "road rage" and/or accidents because they are responding purely based on a passive emotional response. However, one can realize she is driving slowly and the better action is to move to the right lane to allow the tailgater to pass. Also, she can remember the other drivers' determined nature and that this person could not have acted in any other way given his or her own set of causes, what they were going through in the moment, and realize that it is counterproductive to get upset about something so trivial (5P6). The rational person realizes this is a ridiculous thing to be angry about and can move on feeling good that they avoided a potentially hazardous or frustrating situation and is able to go about their day more joyously (5P10S). When a person realizes one's own advantage (*conatus*), the satisfaction of the mind by acting according to the right way of living (4p52), the good that comes from mutual friendship and a 'common society', and the necessity of Nature in people or events unfolding, then one will be more likely to overcome her negative emotions related to certain 'wrongs'. There are of course things which will be difficult to overcome, but Spinoza claims that in one's understanding of things this way, by the right ways of living and understanding of necessity, that one will overcome these more quickly than if she didn't use reason to understand things in this way. Moreover, if one only relied on one's emotions, as does the person who operates by the first kind of knowledge, then perhaps she could never get out of sadness, or variations of it.

So, whereas the person who only operates by the first type of knowledge simply takes events to be as they are, or accepts effects without a desire to understand the causes, the rational person using adequate knowledge and reflection will strive to understand why they feel, or are behaving, a certain way. However, unlike the rational person, who has to work to understand their emotions and rely on personal rules to ensure they act with *tenacity* and/or *nobility*, the intuitive person has already established these things so firmly as to not need them. They simply act in the best way possible, in a way that makes the decision seem instantaneous. The few propositions relating to the free person in Part Four of the *Ethics* mean to illustrate the actions that would fall out from the free person's use of ingrained rationality, or established prescriptions of reason, and are not inclusive to all virtues that would or could fall out from them. The examples given are: the free person does not fear death, is valued in avoiding danger as in overcoming it, avoids the favors of the ignorant, has earnest gratitude toward one another, and is always honest (4P67, P69, P70, P71, P72). It is important to regard these in certain degrees rather than absolutes or drawing conclusions that do not align with the point of the actions.²⁰ For example, the free person has no fear of death because to fear is to engage in a type of sadness, a passion. The free person only seeks to promote their advantage and does so naturally. So, it is not that she would welcome death, or would not be upset if it came sooner than later, but that the free person would not waste time worrying about something which is at the same time certain to happen, yet uncertain when and how it will occur. That action of worrying, or dwelling in fear, would only hinder her striving and simply would not occur in her. One can see this also with the example of always being honest. It can be argued that there are times when a person may need to be dishonest to save one's self,

²⁰ The 'point' being what these propositions seek to illustrate much like a fable. In that they are to illustrate the ideal perfected human that the rational person desires to become.

to preserve in one's being, and in doing so is choosing a lesser evil over a greater one, by the dictate of reason, for a greater future good (4P65, P66).²¹

What is perhaps most important to recognize about the free person, who operates via intuitive knowledge, is that they are free from the struggle of the emotions. It is not that they do not have emotions, but that they are not controlled by them.²² In this they live a continually active self-determined life, fully knowing themselves, and taking every event or emotion to be another opportunity to increase their activity of purely living in the moment. It is in this that some have aligned the intuitive person with a sort of high level Buddhist meditative living.²³ Further, it is in this state of pure activity that one can feel the greatest joy derived not only from one's self-determination, as in the person of reason, but based on the intellectual love of Nature that can only be truly felt through intuitive knowledge.

Commonly, when a person is called virtuous, it is said because that person has expressed some action which aligns with what others would consider a good or right action which could be courage, temperance, chasteness, frugality or justice to name a few. For these virtues to be exercised there need not be a certain kind of knowledge which one employs to act with virtue, it is simply the exercise itself which constitutes virtue. However, say by a classical Aristotelian account, a single act of 'virtue', say courage, which is not supported by years of habituation to right action and phronesis in the author, cannot be rightly called a virtuous action. The act of courage may perhaps be called a good action and the first step toward *developing* a virtuous disposition, yet it is not virtue itself. By an Aristotelian account it is after one has gained a character disposition ingrained by years of habituation coupled by achieving phronesis that one can be said to have a virtuous character, or to act virtuously. For Spinoza building a certain character is also of great importance; however one need not have that character cemented before one can be called virtuous. For example, the person of reason can be said to be virtuous, or to act virtuously, without having the constant virtuous disposition that the model of the free person has. One's being virtuous is synonymous with the use of one's power of self-determination. Thus, the more self-determined one is, the more virtuous they can be said to be, and this self-determination rests on an understanding of Nature, as has been explained. Certainly, there are more aspects of Aristotelian virtue one could compare and contrast with Spinozistic virtue, but that would go outside the scope of this work. What is important here is that virtue for Spinoza is something that anyone with reason and the proper understanding of Nature can express. The person of opinion or imagination, who does not understand Nature nor her own (determined) nature as a part of Nature's causal structure, cannot be said to be virtuous in any degree because she lacks the understanding, or use of understanding, necessary to be said to act, or self-determine. Spinoza's virtue is about self-determined action, over passivity to the world, in an effort to maintain a constant joyous disposition based upon knowledge and understanding, and to promote a harmonious rational society.

More on Knowledge and the Significance of Virtuous Character

21 This topic of honesty and the free person is more completely dealt with by Don Garrett in "A Free Man Always Acts Honestly, not Deceptively": Freedom and the Good in Spinoza's *Ethics*".

22 To note: 3D3, "...by affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained...Therefore, if we can be the adequate cause of any of these affections, I understand by the affect and action; otherwise, a passion." The free person, in having adequate knowledge of themselves and the world, is able to be the adequate cause of 'active' affects, which further promotes her activity. As opposed to one whose knowledge is inadequate and who is passive to her affects.

23 De Dijn in his work claims this, and his basis comes from Jay Wetlesen, "...'lose' ourselves in a meditative activity in which our passions are not so much exterminated as functioning as occasions for further meditative thinking, with the active emotions it involves." (De Dijn, p. 50).

From what has been said in the *Ethics*, up to Part Four, 'knowledge of Nature' pertains to reason and intuitive knowledge (from 2P46 and 2P47S),²⁴ however what Spinoza is primarily concerned with until Part Five of the *Ethics* is the second type of knowledge: reason. He is concerned with reason, and in 4P28²⁵ calls reason the mind's greatest good because, by 2P47S, without having a substantial amount of ingrained adequate knowledge from reason, a person cannot move toward deducing specific things. It is in the ability to deduce specific things from an existing significant body of universal knowledge that one comes to have intuitive knowledge. When Spinoza states that "the greatest good of those who seek virtue is common to all, and can be enjoyed by all equally" (4P36), he does not mean to entail that intuitive knowledge, or becoming the free person, is something that can be common to all, but that reason, and acting by the guidance of one's reason can be enjoyed by all equally. From this, it should be clear that becoming the free person is not something that Spinoza held could be achieved by anyone who set themselves to it, which at first glance seems to be what he is claiming, but it *is* instead a difficult and rare thing to achieve, and that the rare few who set themselves toward it will attain (5P42S).

In 5P25, Spinoza claims, "the greatest striving of the mind and its greatest virtue is understanding things by the third kind of knowledge", which seems to contradict 4P28 in that the greatest virtue of one's mind was to know Nature in respect to having adequate knowledge based on reason, which would hopefully, if utilized properly, form into the third type of knowledge. So, where reason had once been one's greatest good, now it has shifted to intuitive knowledge. This seems to be due to the desire to move people toward building an intellectual stronghold based upon reason before moving on to forming intuitive knowledge. The switch of the mind's greatest good in respect to knowledge of Nature, from reason to intuitive knowledge, occurs because it is only by intuitive knowledge that humans as finite modes can use their intellect in a manner which resembles Nature's intellect (Garrett, 2010, pg. 113-114). So, the more that a person who has established a significant body of adequate universal knowledge deduces singular things from that body of knowledge, the more it is that she will understand Nature (5P24). In this a person can be said to know Nature more, or to be closer to Nature, and in this feel the greatest satisfaction at her ability to 'pass to a greater perfection', to become the free person, and feel the deepest joy in this (by 5P27). In addition to becoming the free person and feeling the deepest joy, the free person understands even more deeply than the person of reason of Nature as the cause, and feels a deep intellectual love of Nature (by 5P32C). It is this intellectual love of Nature, accompanied by the joy one feels as the free person, that is eternal blessedness and the great 'reward' of the *Ethics* (5P36S).²⁶

However, as hinted earlier, the difference between the person of reason and the free person is that the joy the free person feels (intellectual love of Nature) is greater and constant, or non-transitory. Whereas the person of reason experiences a joy that is more or less fleeting, dependent upon how close one is to the ideal in the free person. This separation is what concerns some, such as De Dijn, who is concerned that without fully achieving the ideal one is stuck with the 'sorrows of reason', where one knows the better, but cannot avoid the worse (De Dijn, pg.48). He suggests that one cannot have any true success over the emotions by reason alone, nor fully achieve leading the

²⁴ All ideas exist in Nature, as do all things, however to say one had knowledge of something in Nature, would mean they understand it clearly and distinctly, or adequately. Thus, knowledge of Nature is exclusive to reason and intuitive knowledge.

²⁵ 4P28, "Knowledge of God is the mind's greatest good; its greatest virtue is to know God."

²⁶ While eternal blessedness is the highest goal one could achieve through a virtuous character, the doctrine of the eternity of the mind, as a constitutive part of eternal blessedness, is not necessary for one to know to strive for virtue for Spinoza (5P41). He claims it unnecessary in reaction to those who claim that without some divine reward or punishment after one's death that people will not be able, or apt, to live their lives virtuously. Yet, Spinoza says that people do not need religion, or some kind of eternity, to be virtuous persons in their daily lives — people instead need reason based on adequate knowledge (5P41S).

good life, unless one achieves becoming the free person.²⁷ The concern that the person of reason is stuck with the 'sorrows of reason', or that she will never feel joy as deeply as the free person, is easily dismissed when it is realized that a perfected human state is largely unobtainable.²⁸ As mentioned, humans, as a part of Nature, will always be subject to Nature and the passions.²⁹ Even De Dijn admits that the best one can hope for is that she minimizes the control of emotions so that the emotions occupy the smallest part of one's mind. (De Dijn, pg. 53). Events will occur of which one can have no foresight or control, which will lead any person, "free" or otherwise, into passivity, events in which one does not know the cause of the event or thing, and derives passive emotions due to lack of understanding. What I claim is the best one can hope for in this quest for self-betterment, or virtue, is to experience glimpses of the intuitive/free self, and the joys from reason, more often than not so one is motivated to continue to move toward the ideal one desires to be, as seen in the free person. Without the doctrine of eternal blessedness, or eternity of the mind, and due to human bondage, it should be clear now why habituation to *tenacity* and *nobility* is most important. These states will be what enable one to be apt to control their emotions and move one to flourish, not only individually but also communally, in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

Through an understanding of Spinoza's concepts of virtue, the prescriptions of reason, the virtuous states of *tenacity* and *nobility*, and the free person, I hope to have made clear the complexity of Spinoza's concept of virtue, or one's virtuous activity. Further, I hope I have highlighted the problem of our determinism, or human bondage, as the cause for sadness and strife in individuals and communities alike. Specifically, the cause is due to people tending not to think about the causes of their feelings and actions, but instead to think they can control everything (even if they may not explicitly think and/or say this) despite being controlled, or acted upon, themselves. This leads to unfounded expectations and disagreements because people tend to think others are like them, but are not, as each individual comes from their own series of causes. It is in one's realization of their own, and all things', determined nature as being a part of Nature, that one can start to reason and understand in certain ways that decreases one's sadness, frustration, anger and the like toward those things outside of oneself. Additionally, one can lessen those passive emotions and/or passive behaviors by increasing their knowledge of Nature and knowledge of oneself as a part of Nature, through knowing one's own psychology, more what causes her to act in certain ways, what brings about certain emotions, and how to use that knowledge to one's advantage. It is in this that one can move toward virtue, seeking what is best by their nature (conatus) and avoiding what will hinder or harm it. What I have also shown is that it is in the activity of pursuing one's own advantages that one feels good, or happy, and does so the more one understands Nature, because she can make more informed rational choices. Further, the more one

²⁷ True virtue, or leading the perfected human 'good life', can only exist in the free person because the person of reason still has a certain lack of power (4P37S1). They may act virtuously, and do so the more they habituate themselves to the guidance of reason through acting with *tenacity* and *nobility*; however their use of virtue will always be less perfect than the virtue that exists in the free person, simply by the means of which they must employ it. Therefore, the greatest virtue is to be found in the free person whose virtuous activity is constant, and a lesser virtue to be found in the person of reason whose virtuous activity waxes and wanes.

²⁸ In addition to the point that becoming the free person is largely unachievable, in "Spinoza's Ethical Theory", Garrett, states the free person is a model to set oneself to in one's process of enhancing their existence, or working to lead an ethical life, and that within the *Ethics* the perfectly free person would turn out inconsistent with Spinoza's initial propositions (Garrett, 1996, pg. 289).

²⁹ 3P59S- "From what has been said it is clear that we are driven about in many ways by external causes, and that, like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate."

4P4C- By 4P3 and 4P4, "From this it follows that man is necessarily always subject to passions, that he follows and obeys the common order of Nature, and accommodates himself to it as much as the nature of things requires."

5Pref.- "Here, then, as I have said, I shall treat only of the power of the mind, or of reason, and shall show, above all, how great its dominion over the affects is, and what kind of dominion it has for restraining and moderating them. For we have already demonstrated above that it does not have an absolute dominion over them."

acts based on knowledge and feels joy from the action, the more one wants this virtue not only for oneself, but for others as well. However, to be honest, the reason one wants this for others is so they can get along with other people more easily (agree in natures) to benefit one's own striving. Still, this does still benefit the whole even if at its core it can be claimed solely egoistic.

By way of understanding the benefits that come from virtue, and its components, I have shown they can be easily 'taken away' by external causation, or our human bondage to the passions. When a person is feeling happiness in their striving along comes an event, person, or passion that takes them off guard and sends them into some variation of sadness. Due to this one must habituate oneself to a certain way of thinking to deal with these events in a way that best promotes one's striving. This way of thinking includes the aforementioned knowledge of Nature and causal determinism, but it is more in understanding one's emotions and reactions to events or things in the world. After having understanding of one's emotions and reactions one's virtue is seen in thinking about what would be the best action to aid oneself (*tenacity*) or another (*nobility*) in their striving, or what could benefit both. Further, the value in this type of habituation (practice) is supported by its use and study in psychotherapy.

Due to the difficulty in achieving a perfected intuitive knowledge and by being bound to the order of Nature (4P4C), the ideal set to achieve in the free person who experiences eternal blessedness is largely unachievable for most all people. Yet, Spinoza's philosophy, or specifically virtue, is meant to be one common and achievable by all (4P36). If one is to seek virtue, or a virtuous manner of living from Spinoza's work, that can be common to all, I claim we must defer to reason. I have shown not only eternal blessedness regarding the eternity of the mind, which Spinoza claims is unnecessary (5P41), but in the blessedness that follows from intuitive knowledge and the intellectual love of Nature (5P36S), as unnecessary as well, as one can experience, to a lesser degree, this same joy through reason. Through this it has been my task to show that the more practical goal in obtaining virtue, or in realizing the ethics of the *Ethics*, comes from the joy one feels in realizing her virtue, a type of blessedness, through reason, and by aiding others to realize this joy as well in one's daily life.

Works Cited

- Aloni, Nimrod. "Spinoza as Educator: From eudaimonistic ethics to an empowering and liberating pedagogy." *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. 40.4 (2008): 5
- Curley, E.M.. "Spinoza's Moral Philosophy." *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Majorie Grene. Notre Dame: University of Nortre Dame Press, 1973.
- Curley, Edwin. *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. 87-135.
- De Dijn, Herman. "Ethics IV: The Ladder, Not the Top: The Provisional Morals of the Philosopher." *Ethica 4: Spinoza on Reason and the "Free Man"*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal. New York, NY: Little Room Press, 2004. Print. 37-56
- Garrett, Don. "A Free Man Always Acts Honestly, not Deceptively": *Freedom and the Good in Spinoza's Ethics*" in *Spinoza: Issues and Directions: The Proceedings of the Chicago Conference*. Ed. Edwin Curley and Pierre Francois-Moreau. Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J.Brill, 1990.
- Garrett, Don. "Spinoza's Ethical Theory." *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*. Ed. Don Garrett. New York, Ny: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Garrett, Don. "Spinoza's Theory of *Scientia Intuitive*" *Scientia in early modern philosophy : seventeenth-century thinkers on demonstrative knowledge from first principles*. Ed. Tom Sorell; G A J Rogers; Jill Kraye. Dordrecht, Netherlands ; New York, N.Y : Springer, 2010.
- Jarrett, Charles. "The Ethics, Part V: The mind's power and Blessedness." *Spinoza: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007. 155-176.
- LeBuffe, Michael. "Spinoza's Psychological Theory", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.),
URL= <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/spinoza-psychological/>>.
- Rosenthal, M.A. "Tolerance as a Virtue in Spinoza's Ethics." *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 39(4) (2001), 535-557
- Robertson, Donald. "Spinoza Philosophical Psychotherapy." *UK College of Hypnosis & Hypnotherapy*. UK College of Hypnosis & Hypnotherapy, 10, Apr, 2009. Web. 28 Sep 2011.
<<http://ukhypnosis.wordpress.com/2009/04/10/spinoza-philosophical-psychotherapy/>>.
- Spinoza, Benedict de. *The Ethics and Other Works*. Ed. And Trans. Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Steinberg, Diane. "Knowledge in Spinoza's *Ethics*." *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza's Ethics*. Ed. Olli Koistinen. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Ethica III: Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist*. Ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel , New York, NY: Little Room Press, 1999.

Wilson, Margaret D. "Spinoza's Theory of Knowledge." *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*. Ed. Don Garrett. New York, Ny: Cambridge University Press, 1996.