

A History of Philosophy

37 Reason and Emotions in Spinoza

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A concluding look at Spinoza's philosophy, Reason and Emotion, which gets us into his ethics, which is, after all, the title of the entire major work, even though it takes him quite a while to get to it, and leads us towards what obviously involves terms of religious implications of his pantheistic philosophy. So let's refresh our minds first of all on the premises that he is bringing to the discussion, and I hope that by now you have these pretty clearly in mind. The first, of course, is his double-aspect monism.

There is one all-inclusive being, substance, with at least two attributes, two that we know of. Thought seems to imply conscious organization and extension, that is to say, material existence. So he understands the materiality of this one being in terms of the mechanistic science of the day.

In that sense, he's a materialist. And he seems to be thinking of this conscious, intelligible organization in some way parallel to the Stoic Logos, which Philo of Alexandria had tied into Judaism, and later Christian thinkers had worked on. So that you have in the totality of reality these two aspects, these two sides of it, as the Stoics had thought.

There's the material stuff of material, basic material, elemental stuff, and there's the Logos structure, the orderedness of it, which gives it the kind of structured universe that it is. Call it nature, call it God, it's one and the same thing. And at the finite level, that means, of course, that all of what there is about all of us are simply finite moments, finite modes is the way he puts it, finite moments in the being of the all-inclusive one.

So that your present thoughts are God's clear and distinct thoughts, not necessarily as clear and distinct in your thinking. And your present bodily condition, bodily processes, are obviously a finite aspect of the overall physical cosmos. So this double aspect applies both to the infinite, all-inclusive level and the finite, particular level.

I have a problem understanding the modes. He describes modes at the beginning as changing or altering the substance. Is that meaning changing from infinite to finite or something? No.

Because he describes a finite mode. He speaks of modes as if they are some sort of modification. As if it's some change, as you put it, taking place in the one.

Does the all-inclusive one itself change? No. No, in this sense that it is unchangingly the all-inclusive. Now, if it is all-inclusive, then there is nothing it could change into because it includes all possibilities.

What change there is takes place in the finite modes which come and go within the all-inclusive. So that your yesterday thoughts and your today thoughts are modifications because they come and go within the overall timeless thought. All-inclusive, you see.

And your bodily changes, changes of position, your hair falling out. These are modifications at the finite level. Whereas the all-inclusive embraces the whole lot.

So you can't say that God, the one, is changing. No. Unchangingly one.

But the changes take place in the finite processes, and it's only there that change occurs. When we talked last time about error, does that mean that we're in error? Pick it up in terms of good and evil. Is evil within God? Is error within God? Well, we saw last time that for Spinoza, good and evil are both confused ideas.

They're not clear and distinct ideas. They're imaginative ideas that we come up with. There is no objective correlate, no objective point of reference for what we call good or evil in reality.

There's no objective reality to good as distinct from evil and evil as distinct from good. Now, similarly to error. You see, because error arises from confused ideas to which we give assent.

Assent that we think is a matter of free will, but that, too, is a confused idea. So everything about error is a matter of intellectual confusion on our part. Which does not occur in the case of God.

You see, it's only in the finite modes that there are those lacks of clarity and distinctness. Those confusions, those imaginations. We have three modes of thought.

Opinion, imagination, reason. God has only one clear and distinct understanding, reason. So there's no error in God.

So does that mean that we can think of things? Except that when we do, we're not thinking of things. We're not thinking of anything if it doesn't exist, are we? We're having confused ideas. Ideas are passing thoughts.

They're not things. There's only one thing being substance. That is God.

So if you have some erroneous idea about some finite things, you are simply fuzzy in your thinking about God. Because any finite thing is a finite mode of God. So your errors are simply your confusion about the one substance and its attributes and modes.

Ruth? Not so much as there's... You discussed how virtuous action is a survival tactic. And that we're determined to act that way because it profits our lives. And he says that it's only by living in right reason that we can live virtuously.

And my question is, is there a specific... Through our reason, we can continue to reach the right answers and information about how to... Well, it's also stoic. Remember that for Stoics, the emphasis was on right reason in the sense of contemplating the order of nature and accepting our place within it. And Spinoza's saying it's essentially the same.

A clear and distinct understanding of your place within nature leads to tranquility, virtue, and so forth. But on the other hand, you are right that when he comes to talking in those terms, four and five, it does seem to sound more Platonic than Stoic. And it's that sort of thing which some have traced to the Kabbalistic literature of Judaism.

Now, in the history of Jewish thought, you have some Jewish Platonism, as in the case of Philo. Some Jewish Aristotelianism, as in the case of Moses Maimonides. And this Kabbalistic literature was closer to the Gnostic tradition.

At least, that's the way it's usually described. Now, the kind of Gnostic tradition that we ran into was the dualistic sort. But there was also a kind of Gnosticism that had a hierarchy of being.

You see, a unilateral hierarchy of being, such as we found in Middle Platonism. They picked it up from the Neopythagoreans, who were influenced by the Gnostics. And it fed over, of course, into Neo-Platonism.

And it seems to me that this ingredient, even if it is the influence of the Kabbalistic literature of Judaism, emphasizing love of God, the first and great commandment, the Shema of ancient Israel, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one, and so forth. And blessedness is found in that, love of God. That doesn't keep it from having a Platonic influence, even within the Kabbalistic tradition.

Does that make sense? And, you know, you could look at the overall structure of his thinking, and you remember how I drew the words, you could look upon that as sort of a hierarchy of being. Except that, this is where it falls short; there's no emanation out of God to the outside of God. You see, so that finite things are not something other than God that have sort of overflowed from God.

Now, in Neo-Platonism, that's what emanations are. They are of the very stuff of God that has overflowed from God. But no, these are modes of God's own being.

It's very different. So, metaphysically, it seems closer to the Stoic Pantheism, though you get some ethical overtones that may be more reminiscent of Plato. Follow? I see some heads nodding, with eyes wide open, alert.

Okay, so then one premise has to do with double-aspect monism. And since I've already said it in the discussion, another premise has to do with the imaginative, confused ideas of good and evil. Okay.

So there is no good distinct from evil in two separate senses. No. And, of course, the other premise has to do with his thoroughgoing determinism, where everything that occurs in God is determined by the very essence of God.

And, consequently, every finite mode of thought is determined by the causal effect of other modes of thought. And everything that occurs in nature is caused by finite physical events that are caused by, so forth, a thoroughgoing, pervasive determinism. We'll see in a moment a little more of this, but somebody asked in the office yesterday, couldn't contain questions about Spinoza, two people couldn't, and just came bursting into the office with questions about Spinoza.

One of them was asking, well, what drives this ongoing causal process? You see. What drives the process? Obviously, there is something that must not only start it, but must sustain it. You see.

And the answer is, of course, in one way of putting it, the essence of God, which is causal drive. You see. Or, as he puts it in developing his psychology, it's conatus.

Now, that's the Latin word from which we get our psychological term, conative. Conative tendencies are those that have to do with will, assertiveness, and so forth. Drive.

So, conatus is sort of an inner push, an inner pull, an inner drive that runs throughout everything. It's the very nature of being. It's as if it's almost as if he's saying, now wait a minute, you mechanistic scientists.

Is matter that dead? Or is it really a bundle of energy? You see, and if that's the sort of thing that's underlying this, he's jumping a couple of hundred years ahead of his time. You see. Is matter dead, inert, acted on only from outside? Which is the mechanistic science view.

Or perhaps were the pre-Socratics not so crazy after all when they said that matter is in some sense alive, full of divinity? Remember Thales? Well, Spinoza seems to be thinking in that sort of direction. And next week, when we get into Leibniz, you'll find that Leibniz understands the basic constituents of reality as themselves units of energy.

You know, yeah, he talks of substance, oh he's a pluralist, many substances. Every substance is a unit of energy, force. Now he never heard of $E = MC^2$, but he got the idea.

It's not bad for 1700. Just ask a question about one of his premises, but this determinism isn't what his whole ethics, like what he's writing, isn't it just a waste, not a waste of time, but what's the point of reading it once you're determined to read it already? What's the point of knowing this? Well, yeah, what do you mean when you say what's the point? Now, what sort of thing is a point? Well, when he talks about how the best thing to do is to, you know, sort of become disaligned so that you have an intellectual level, it seems like, well, it doesn't matter what, if I'm trying to do that or not, because everything's determined anyway. So by a point, are you asking what the purpose is, or isn't he leading to a self-contradictory conclusion? Now, which of the two do you mean, a purpose or a self-contradictory conclusion? So you're trying to argue that Spinoza is self-contradictory.

I was hoping you'd go the other way and ask, if everything's determined, what's the point of trying? You see. Well, his point is, now that's a third sense of point. The point he's trying to make is that the fact that everything is determined does not exclude our individual efforts, because the causal process is the causal process that involves our individual effort, that involves even asking the question, "What's the point? Confused idea, though, that may be.

Because all those things are determined. And so the thought processes we have, debating whether it's contradictory or not, are all part of the process that pushes us on. You see, keep in mind how deterministic the intellectual processes are for him.

And you can see things in your own experience that way. You get so involved late one evening in debating with Spinoza that you go to bed, and your mind won't rest. It goes on and on and on and on.

And you're countering some of his proofs and propositions at three o'clock in the morning. Wide awake. You think, does that happen to you? Well, you know, that particular example may not, but that sort of thing happens to many of us, I think.

Yeah. Well, you see, there's a deterministic process. You don't control.

And even in following through the steps in a deductive proof, you are drawn relentlessly to the logical conclusion. You see? Last night in that lecture about Japanese music, Professor Mull got to the point in the lecture when he would sing or play a few phrases on the piano. And then the audience would spontaneously come up with the next few phrases.

Huh? You know, it's almost like Plato with the slave boy doing mathematical problems. Here was Mull with the slave boys and girls doing musical problems. And they seemed to know where it went.

Yeah, so you say, what's the point? I can't help myself. You help yourself all the time. Even though your helping yourself is already determined by other helps you've given yourself along the way, which were determined by.

And, of course, your thinking process is so determined in certain patterns that I would expect that kind of question from you, David. It's the kind of good question David always asks. So there's a predictability about our thinking.

Why? Well, that's the way Spinoza would, I suspect, come at it. I'm a little nervous asking a question because you might think it's predictably stupid or something. You said that.

The thing that I don't like about the rationalist trend in Spinoza, in this case, is that it seems like they've been locked in a closet for too long or something. Because they don't seem to take any account of experience. In the sense that, I mean, they explain it in rational means, but still, on the other hand, it seems like sometimes to me that I just want to shake them and go, well, no, not really.

I mean, look at the way it works. Oh, wait a minute. Experience is opinion.

Opinion is a confused idea. It strikes me that's perfectly biblical. We see through a glass darkly.

If that isn't a confused idea, what is? You take account of what you see through a glass darkly, but you don't take it as the last word until you see a little more clearly. You know, the relativity of sense perception is an old story from the beginning of Western philosophy. Are you saying? Take relative.

Take it more seriously. Take it seriously as the last word? No. Experience alone is never enough.

You see, Spinoza would respond that way. Frankly, I would too. And I think even an empiricist would, and say that raw experience is not enough.

Because we have to analyze our experience enough in order to sift, organize, and draw conclusions. Now, underlying your question, of course, is the fact that you don't like a person who's such a rationalist that it's all a priori. Yeah, nor do I. Right now, I'm playing devil's advocate.

But the fact that you don't like a rationalist who says it's all a priori doesn't mean to say that we ought not to appreciate the fact that at least something is a priori. And experience ain't enough. Deathly silence, as if I've murdered the vicar or something.

Is empiricism that sacred? It seems that concepts must be able to translate in an experiential way. Yes. Yeah.

Alright, what do you find that's not translatable? What in Spinoza is not translatable? It's a very good question. Yours, I mean, not mine. Sounds like some confused ideas, doesn't it? Now, according to Spinoza, they're drawn by it.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, but when I say to you, what did you mean by that? Did you mean what you said? And you say, yes, of course I did. What I say is what I say.

You're appealing to logic. Who are you? Are you Jack or Bill? Bill. Do you mean Bill or not Bill? I mean Bill.

You're appealing to logic. If you didn't appeal to logic, you couldn't communicate. You couldn't function in a world with a reference to any particular object.

You wouldn't know whether you meant that one or another one. Logic is descriptive of every kind of action, thought, or word that we use. The basic law of logic is the law of identity.

A equals A and not non-A. So you cannot give any attention to any particular A without the law of identity. You couldn't ask your question whether it were for the law of identity.

Yeah, but that's good as a basis, but it doesn't necessarily reach into all the aspects. Well, is there any realm of experience that isn't touched by that? Experience has to do with particular things that have identity. Now, I think I know what you're trying to get at, which may be that deductive reasoning, deductive proofs, are more like a parade ground drill than the actual tactics of life.

Yeah, I buy that. I agree. That's what Wittgenstein says.

It's his figure of speech. I think it's right. But the thing is that parade ground drill teaches you the kind of precision that's going to be necessary in the tactics of life.

Let me put it another way. What he's trying to do is to develop in scientific fashion a philosophy of life. Sure, look where he's going.

But why in scientific fashion? Well, because of the epistemological vacuum of those days, remember? You see? Because of the crisis of authority, which was the whole theme of the 17th century, Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, and Spinoza, the answer in this epistemological vacuum is science. Hobbes. You know, how can we ground politics to avoid all this infighting? Get a scientific basis for politics.

You see? Well, Spinoza wants a scientific basis for a philosophy of life. Now, I suspect in the light of that what you're saying is you don't think it's very practical or practicable to have a scientific basis for a philosophy of life. Well, not necessarily.

Yes, tactically it works out, but just to follow up with that. Well, do you want anything less than blessedness? That's where it works out. Oh, now you're saying you... But you see, now your objection is not to logic, but to the conclusions he draws by this logic.

And if you object to that, you've got to find where the mistake that he made is. Where's the proof that is invalid? Which of the premises are false? Because if you agree in principle to the laws of logic, then granted certain premises, the conclusions follow. If the premises are true of reality, so are the conclusions. You see? And so, you see, I have to defend Spinoza in that regard.

If you say he doesn't have any bearing on life, what's this? If you say I don't like those conclusions, the way he draws them, well, specifically, why not? What went wrong? You see? And I hope that we begin to see that if you don't like what Spinoza's doing, you have to find the hole in his logic. Don't throw out logic. That's the baby with the bathwater.

If you throw out logic, you'll never think about anything, you'll never do anything. You'll never be able to say, I am I, am I not? You'll really have a problem of identity, you'll see. No, the problem isn't logic; it's something with his use of logic.

Now, it may be that this kind of scientific method that he's using is the wrong kind of method to use on a philosophy of life. Well, all right, to understand why he does it, then, put him back in his historical setting with that epistemological crisis. Where else does he go? Say, well, to his Jewish faith.

Well, isn't that what he's doing, but finding a basis for what he understands of the Jewish faith? Yeah. You can criticize him, of course, that he comes at it this way instead of straight from the Old Testament Scriptures. Well, you see, he has problems with the Old Testament Scriptures.

That Tractatus, what was it called? Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, which he wrote, you see, posed some of the problems he had with the Jewish, with Orthodox Judaism. So he shut himself off from that route, the Old Testament revelation as it is. But what's the intent of the Old Testament revelation in talking of the Jewish view of life? Well, it's to show us that love of God, obedience to God, is blessedness.

So that's where his Judaism comes through, you see. Now, I've been playing devil's advocate because I don't think we can criticize until we understand. You see, so much criticism comes from not understanding.

Yeah, I disagree with some of his definitions, therefore with some of the axioms. And I have all sorts of problems with the methodology in general. I think there are other ways of handling the epistemological vacuum.

Yeah. How thoroughbred is his determinism? In a couple of places, he talks about pity and repentance being absolutely useless. And so that would... On one hand, you could say, I burnt my hand on the stove.

Well, I'm not going to repent of that act. I'll put my hand back on the stove. Well, you know, why cry about spilled milk? That's what he's saying.

What difference is it going to make? I mean, does he leave room for learning from experience? Yes, you'll be conditioned by it. Conditioned, but not... Well, conditioned by it is to say there's a causal process in which past experiences affect future behaviors. But when you're talking about repentance, being sorry for something or being sorry for somebody else, pity as well as repentance, he would say, no, those are passions which can overwhelm us and keep us from clear-headedness, you see.

So the past is not something to be remembered. Oh, he doesn't say it's not something to... It's not a sense of planning for the future, it's just... No, no, he doesn't say that. You see, repentance is not just remembering so that you plan for the future.

Repentance is an emotion of overpowering remorse that holds you in bondage. That would be his way of putting it. He seems to speak of the emotion as constantly in the extreme.

Well, yeah, then maybe we need to get into his discussion of emotion so that we can see that. He makes a distinction between passions and some other emotions. I'd like to... If he's saying that pity and remorse are not good, with determinism, it almost seems like you don't have any choice in the matter as to whether you are going to feel pity or not.

Or how's that... Well, you see, while you're saying to yourself, now if this is determined, I don't have any choice but to feel remorse, you are beginning to reflect on that, and another line of thought begins to emerge in your consciousness, which also determines your attitude and response. Namely, what I need is not just overpowering emotion. Now, let me get clear about this, and you're after some clear and distinct idea, you see.

So, you do do something about it, which shows that you can. But can doesn't necessarily imply free will. You see, because you can.

Why? In the sense that there are other causal processes leading you to do it. There are things you can do for different reasons. I mean, I can fall off the roof of Blanchard if somebody pushes me.

I can. I sure hope I don't. Let's see.

But not every can is a can of I choose, free will. I have questions, actually. About his rationalistic trend.

Yeah. You made a comment something like, well, what experience can't you find in logic or something of the sort? Well, the first question I have is, I would just ask, well, it seems to me that almost all, not all, but a great deal of what we consider pure reason is from experience in the sense of, like, the law of non-contradiction. I mean, it's interesting to me that whenever they try to prove the law of non-contradiction, they go to experience and say, well, obviously, look, the man can't be here, and the man can't be here at the same time, or something like that.

And so that's my first question, just that it seems like a lot of this is based. I mean, a lot of rationalism actually has its roots in empiricism in the sense that even what he says in his words, I can only think in words. Let me answer that first, the way he would.

You've got to distinguish between the logical status of an idea or a belief and the psychological process by which we acquire it. I mean, how do you learn that one plus one equals two as a young toddler? Oh, from seeing this and seeing this. The psychological process is one of, if you like, empirical learning.

But the logical status of one plus one equals two is not such that it's just an empirical generalization. Now, you see, the term a priori, we don't always use precisely, clearly, distinctly. And I plead guilty, you see, because technically the term a priori has reference, as we'll find when we get to Kant, and I've been saving it until then, has reference to what is a universal and necessary truth.

A universal truth that's logically necessary and cannot possibly be false. Now, you may become aware of that truth through somebody telling you. You may become aware of it by something in experience that brings it to your attention.

But what he's dealing with in that sense is a lot of a priori truth, that is to say, universal and necessarily true, in that sense. To contradict them is self-contradictory. So to say we learn them by experience is irrelevant.

You follow? The only other thing was, it seems like, this is the thing that makes me emotionally, in a sense, not like this. Yeah, I don't like it emotionally either. I always say to myself when we get to Spinoza, oh, Spinoza, you know.

I'd rather have Descartes than Leibniz, but Spinoza. Do I have to wade through Spinoza again? Yes, Holmes, you do. It's just that it seems like it's such a dead philosophy, almost, in a sense.

Wow, wow. He was talking about how it promotes a sense of purposelessness. Yeah.

It's almost like a really strict... No, I don't think it promotes purposelessness. And don't say nasty things about Calvinism. All you're doing is expressing confused ideas.

Where were we? No, I know what you're saying. Seems irrelevant. What's the point? Seems dead.

Abstruse. Yeah, there are a lot of things that are abstruse. Mathematics is.

But are you going to turn your back on mathematics? It can be abstruse, but tremendously valuable and useful. You see? And he's not saying, oh, this is the only way you can ever get to know these conclusions. No, he's simply trying to show that it's demonstrable in what was understood then as a scientific fashion.

Well, if you don't want to understand the scientific thinking of the 17th century, you're confused about other things. Right. But I agree.

It's not exactly the sort of stuff I like to read late at night when I want to relax. No, I don't take Spinoza on vacation with me. I had a grad school professor who took Kant's critique of pure reason with him in the military in World War I and carried it in his hip pocket in the infantry across Europe.

I presume he got it out once in a while, too. Some people would. But believe me, well, I'd rather do it with Kant than with Spinoza.

But incidentally, if you were a hostage for seven years and you had Spinoza with you, you would survive seven years as a hostage much better than if you had a bunch of

comic papers with you. Those guys are saying now they're out. What their minds were filled with in the past is what sustained them.

Yeah, that's what I'm thinking. Seven years. It would take me to work through all those proofs.

Yeah, but there are people who thrive on this. A friend of mine, Alan Donegan, who taught at Caltech and died just about a year ago, was a very fine philosopher and became a Christian about 15 years ago. I mean, the last book he wrote was on Spinoza.

And I want to get a hold of it and read it and see what he did with Spinoza. But he was enthusiastic about Spinoza. Admittedly, he had one of those iron-trap minds.

Yeah, that's speaking about psychological reasons for being interested in Spinoza. And you were having psychological reasons for not being interested in Spinoza. If you had a steel-trap mind, maybe you would be interested in Spinoza.

But obviously, there are Spinoza fans, just as there are the opposite. Incidentally, I'm glad we got into this debate because I was planning next time. This sort of reaction always sets in at this juncture in the course.

I was planning next time to say something about the significance and purpose of this kind of metaphysical exploration. So you're saving me a lot of effort in doing this. Because if you say it, you get it out in this sort of discussion.

It's much more effective than if I just spout a few lines about it. Not to be claiming to have a steel-trap mind. But I have a connection to Eastern thinking.

And it made me want some of the Eastern influences in Jewish thinking. How much that may or may not have influenced him, or whether it was coming out of... I've heard in terms of writing about Jewish logic, Hebrew logic, and the whole concept of block logic. There's a lot more comfort with the kind of paradoxes that we, being so trained in the Greek thinking, are uncomfortable with.

And I just thought it was really fascinating, and it added a whole other life to ways of approaching... Keep in mind the sort of thing I said when we were getting into Spinoza. That if you want a paradigm case of a pantheistic philosophy, this is the one that's most meticulously worked out. Not that all pantheists use this kind of scientific method.

Certainly, Eastern pantheism doesn't seem to. But the value, beyond the historical value and influence and so forth, in looking at Spinoza is to see just what is entailed

in pantheism. And I take it from the things you're bucking against, like his determinism, that you're getting the point of what's entailed in pantheism.

You see, it's coming across. The Eastern pantheist influence is more evident in 19th-century monistic metaphysics than it is here. There's a point that he makes about, insofar as men live in obedience to reason, they always agree.

And then he goes on to say that men who agree, who are in obedience to reason, are only useful to one another. Implying that, I suppose, those who are not reasonable men are useless. Has that been taken by anybody to support tyrannical ideas? I don't think so.

I don't think so. Because he is such an advocate of the rule of reason, you see, that tyranny, which plays to the emotions and springs from passionate emotion, is going to be about the last thing that he would want. Yeah.

Well, since you shot my lecture for the day, which is fine, they deserve to be shot sometimes. Not the lecturer, just the lecture. Let me see if I can capture what I had planned to say about this kind of metaphysical system and just sum it up in that way.

And we'll build on this as we get into Leibniz. These three, Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, are the three great rationalists, epistemologically, a priori knowledge. The three great rationalists of the history of Western thought.

Interpreting the world in accordance with certain a priori conceptions that come out in his definitions. Yeah. This is what is sometimes called a speculative metaphysic.

Where the term speculative, keep in mind, does not refer to wild-eyed speculations, that would be imagination, but refers rather to seeing with the mind's eye, clearly and distinctly. Speculative metaphysics. Now, this is part of what you are seeing, I think.

That kind of speculative metaphysic, developing a picture of reality, tends to generate problems about the relationship of appearance to reality. The relationship of appearance to reality. Spinoza says, this is the way it is, and you say, yes, but, you know, and I have to stand on my head to answer it for Spinoza.

You say what your appearances are in reality. About appearances, we have only confused ideas. Now, what is it that gives rise to this kind of speculative metaphysic, which creates such a tension between appearance and reality? And the thing underlying it is the problems they have with the world of appearances.

The problems with the world of their experience. You see? The world of their experience. Vacuum of knowledge.

A vacuum of authority. You see? Growing conflicts between science and religion. That's more evident in Leibniz.

It will come. You see? So what they are trying to do is to handle the problems in their world, their world of experience. You see? By appealing to certain universal and necessary truths.

Now, there is a contemporary of these people. Who is a jurist? Jurisprudence.

Hugo Grotius. A Dutch thinker. Time of the Hundred Years' War.

Religious war. Catholic versus Protestant. Ravaging Europe.

You see? And there were religious conflicts throughout Europe in the post-Reformation period. What about England? And the religious conflicts that underlay the English Civil War. In Thomas Hobbes' time.

You see? And in Europe likewise. What Grotius did was to look for a universal and necessary basis for law. For laws that will govern and limit the practice of war.

Universal and necessary rather than partisan. You see? Not a sectarian view, but something that is universally binding. You see? Well, it's like the East-West conflict of the last 40 years.

What was the only hope of reaching any agreement and avoiding war? Well, what we've had to do for 40 years is to find something on which there can be universal agreement. And if you can't, you can't reach any agreement. The only point about universal agreement seemed to be survival.

We want to survive, they want to survive. So we had a standoff. You see? The deterrence policy.

Well, now that the standoff has become unnecessary in the way it was. But the point is, when you have conflicting points of view, the only way to resolve them, the only way to prevent conflict, is to come back and look for a universal basis. You see? Well, that's a lot of the motivation.

In other words, the motivation for speculative metaphysics is very, very practical. In Spinoza, it's less evident. I think where it is in Spinoza, frankly, is in his own experience as a Jew in a Protestant world, refugees from the pogrom in Spain, living in free Holland, but as a non-conformist Jew, treated as if he's an atheist.

You see? And that, in those days, remember, was often a capital offence. It may not have been in Holland, but it was in some places. And so what is he doing? Trying to provide a scientific basis for universal truths.

You see? Yeah. So I think that's the kind of motivation. You can say, if you like, that some of it, in some cases, is motivated by apologetics.

Not so much Spinoza as perhaps Descartes. Motivated by the need for a worldview after the breakdown of the medieval worldview. The need to spell out a scientific worldview and see where it leads.

You see? Because you have to have a philosophy to live by. Science seems to be dominating. It may be a product of optimism about the new methods of knowing.

Scientific method. Well, let's see how far this will take us. Is it transferable to other fields? As Bacon thought, Hobbes thought, Descartes thought, Spinoza thought, Leibniz thought, people today think in the tradition of scientific naturalism.

You see? So the motivations are intensely practical. You question the assumptions. But that's different from questioning the project.

You see? Frankly, in contemporary philosophy, we desperately need speculative metaphysical approaches to provide alternatives to the kind of scientific naturalistic metaphysics that have been worked out and are being worked out with meticulous detail in contemporary American philosophy. You see? Now, we're getting alternatives worked out superbly in philosophy of religion. That's only part of the picture.

There's a lot going on in epistemology with this in view. But that's only part of the picture. We need the metaphysical developments.

You see? Because we're at another juncture in history where there's a change in worldviews, a change in the scientific outlook, a change in methodology. Don't despise theory. You see? Theory guides practice.

It's a theory that creates possibilities. It's a theory that critiques fruitless practice. Speculative metaphysics is a theory construction.

It goes on in every discipline. And it must. You see? It's essential for development in any field of inquiry.

Well, that was my speech. At least I got a five-minute lecture in. No, listen, that's a great discussion.

That's the sort of discussion that I think a philosophy teacher would love to have in any college or university in the country. That was first-rate.