

June 27, 2108 Cosmopolis Meeting: Day 2—Orientation (Foundations)

Dennis Prager, *Dennis Prager Sketches the Future of Western Civilization* (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, YouTube, 48:00)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORmW68YmLM4&t=0s&index=39&list=PLo1Jq23H_s5XVxAseMKYJA4aH3cOI07si

Prager's Terminal Value: Goodness (Wisdom? Authenticity?)

Swimming Upstream to the Source

Terminal value is determined by the individual, and the community, within the functional specialty of foundations. From it, all else flows, including the horizon (range of interests), general and specialized concepts (tools for arranging and understanding), and discernment to distinguish between positions and counter-positions.

Downstream from foundations are doctrines. While McEvenue's three questions help with understanding one's foundations, Nash's five clusters of questions focus on fundamental beliefs or judgments about reality. It is important to realize that such judgments came after one's foundational stance has been established. In this sense, authenticity proceeds from the existential state of the subject. For example, truncated or alienated subjects both suffer from blind spots.

Truncated subjects refuse to recognize internal awareness of cognitive operations to be anything but subjective and hence are held captive to a conceptualist epistemology that leads to logical positivism where there exists a truth outside of any human being. Among other things, this leads to an a-historical understanding of human affairs, an over reliance on "scientific" truths as the only reality, and a form of abstraction by elimination (the map is not the territory) rather than abstraction as pulling out the essentials while discarding what is merely accidental.

Alienated subjects do grasp the internal dynamics of human intentionality, but because they are alienated from God they are alienated from themselves. All human good becomes relative as any transcendental God-centered norms even if recognized are not given any legitimacy.

That doctrines have their roots in the subject's foundational stance not only means that the area of primary interest must be an understanding of foundations. but that doctrines themselves are only as sound as the basic authenticity of the subject. Authenticity, as Lonergan puts it, is part and parcel of the transcendental precepts. But the problem for us is that

these precepts, as logical as they might be, do not relate to the condition of the subject. Here is where Prager's terminal value can shed light on the nature of authenticity, for what is authenticity but goodness?

Of course, goodness is rather vague until placed within the context of Lonergan's three basic forms of conversion: intellectual, moral, and religious. While the bible offers faith, hope, and charity as the fundamental, we suggest honesty, courage, and charity in the sense that honesty relates to intellectual conversion (more than a shift away from naive realism to critical realism), courage relates to moral conversion (doing the right thing even at great personal cost, i.e., saving Jews during the Holocaust), and charity as it relates to religious conversion where even the stranger is to be considered a representative of God.

As Prager points out, most parents seek such things as success, wealth, or power for their children; few offer the goal of being a good person. And yet it is goodness that lies at the heart of a sound foundational stance while striving for success only clamps down on a person's encounter with reality. This is evident not only when it comes to evaluating unique socio-political situations but in determining the root cause of these symptoms. It may be tempting to accept one's evaluation and diagnosis as obvious, being "out there to be seen." But the reality is that both are a function of orientation, and orientation is actually a three-fold manifold of foundations, doctrines, and systematics.

But prior to all this is one fundamental question that sets the parameters for all subsequent questions: Does God exist? Beyond a yes or no answer lies a series of subquestions concerning God's nature, etc. Further downstream comes the nature of the universe. And from such questions comes a cluster dealing with how we come to know the world, how moral issues are to be decided, and finally questions of human nature and social reality.

SIDEBAR

World Views: Five Clusters

- **God:** does God exist? If so, what is his nature? One God or many? Personal or an impersonal force? Etc.
- **Metaphysics:** (re the universe)—created by god? Eternal or finite? Purposeful or meaningless? Etc.
- **Epistemology:** Is knowledge of this universe possible? And if so, how?
- **Ethics:** Not that an action is wrong, but why is it wrong.
- **Anthropology:** The nature of being human.

Source: Ronald H. Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1999), pp. 13-17).

How does your orientation compare with Prager's?

What are the consequences of this difference on subsequent operations?

- Evaluating the situation at hand.
- Diagnosing the underlying root cause of these symptoms.
- Estimating scope and constraints on rational action in unique time-and-space-specific circumstances during times of fundamental institutional change.

McEvenue's Three Questions

1. In what realm of meaning, or human activity (for example war, liturgy, family life, politics, sports, aesthetic activity, and so forth) does the speaker expect revelation or salvation to occur?
2. In what precise way is salvation or revelation expected to be experienced by the speaker?
3. What demands upon the speaker, what conversions and what practices, are implied and demanded by this foundational expectancy?

Source: Seán McEvenue, *Interpreting the Pentateuch* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), p. 62.