

OBJECTIFYING DENNIS PRAGER'S FOUNDATIONAL STANCE

A Cosmopolis Educational Project, November 20th, 2018, Russell Charles Baker

This is an first attempt to create a snapshot of Prager's foundational stance by analyzing and evaluating the data collected by going through the entire transcript while asking the question: Does this indicate or suggest something about his foundational stance? This is a tricky question, because any answer rests on one's own foundational stance; any selection tells us a lot about the person making the selection. In this respect, the underlying operation is that of mutual self-mediation. This is the primary focus of this mini-research project.

1. RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

Loneragan's definition of religious conversion is a radical change in the self due to falling in love with God. This is sufficiently broad to include most but not all religions. This type of conversion does not refer to the taking up of a particular religion but to the reality that for some people there is a radical change in their lives that can only be attributed to a divine rather than human attachment. But because there is an eternal dialectic between good and evil—pro-life vs. anti-life generative principles—there also exists a radical turn toward evil, i.e., an “anti-religious” conversion seeking to overthrow the reign of God and placing mankind on the eternal throne. This is a Judeo-Christian orientation to the meaning of life, the universe, and everything; for us, it is foundational.

JUDGMENT

Prager is a deeply religious person profoundly aware of God's influence in the world of human affairs.

EVIDENCE

- 1. Human Dignity.** Prager exhibits a profound respect for individual human dignity, be it that he is careful never to insult guests (14m00s), is charitable to others outside his own immediate socio-political sphere (2m50s), and honors those who give young people a start in life (0m30s).
- 2. Blessed.** Prager can laugh at his own foibles (humility: 0m45s), respects other not for what they say but for who they are (foundational: 8m30s), is very pessimistic yet at the same time happy (faith, hope, & charity: 17m15s), is aware that he has been blessed by God (1m45s), is full of gratitude in thanking God (10m45s), and favors goodness over brains (2m30s).
- 3. Tension.** Prager is aware that there is something better (tension between the transcended and the transcending: 16m00s), recognizes and acknowledges quality and beauty (aesthetic response to goodness: 3m30s), believes that virtually everything good in the world comes from Western civilization (living the tension inherent in a Judeo-Christian society: 19m15s), acts at the reflective level of engaging with others (25m15s), and is very observant when it comes to keeping the Sabbath (transcendental time: 9m45s).
- 4. God Issue.** Prager believes that the question of the existence of God is crucial, for society cannot survive godlessness (29m30s), notes that the Great Seal of the United States portrays the Jews leaving Egypt (the gift of freedom as the result of the direct intervention of God in human history: (32m15), and observes from his trips to Europe that it is a soulless dead place since WW I when Europeans gave up on God (29m45s).

2. MORAL CONVERSION

Here we run into the problem of liberation, for while we may know the good more often than not we are incapable of doing the right thing. Moral conversion exists when the person demonstrates the capacity to do the right thing even at great personal cost. Engaging and sustaining this is only possible through the direct influence of the Divine Mystery because doing good is hard when it flies against human interests and personal wellbeing.

JUDGMENT

Prager's work in the educational field runs directly counter to the prevailing secular “wisdom.” That and his call for an heroic stand against those determined to destroy Western civilization indicates a person whose recognition of evil has led him into a sustained fight against ignorance and moral relativism.

Evidence

- 1. Recognition.** Prager recognizes instances of moral conversion in others, e.g., the author and publisher who published a gutsy book on Andalusia as Myth in the face of cultural opposition (6m00s), the very abandonment of moral principles into a morass of moral relativism (26m00s), the fact that opaque persons are not to be trusted (7m30s), the danger of unbridled human passions (31m15s), the reality that people's capacity for moral conversion has been severely downgraded in our times (38m45s), a general sense of arrogance, self-righteousness, value-signaling, delusional thinking, unearned merit and self-centered individuals among the morally unconverted, knowing that there is something better that transcends human knowing (25m45s) that implies the recognition of evil for otherwise all devolves into feelings (33m50s).
- 2. Bank Accounts.** Prager believes that there are moral bank accounts under the jurisdiction of a “bank manager” (12m30s) that provides objective moral standards that are not possible without acknowledging the existence of God (28m30s), recognizes that the loss of history leads to a loss of moral standards, the rise of moral confusion, and an inability to fight evil (33m50s), for the unconverted without God live in a world that leads to multiple secular religions such as Feminism, Environmentalism, and Humanism (33m00s).
- 3. Personal.** Prager believes that being married and having children is a value, i.e., a moral choice for the morally converted (34m00s), is willing to be challenged, to learn from others, even to be forced to interact with others in the pursuit of wisdom (25m15s), not only believes in the Jewish Bible but is very familiar with the Torah (37m45s), affirms that the state of Western civilization is a moral issue (11m50s), and personally undertakes the educational task of promoting goodness, wisdom, and character development in an age that values little of such things (11m50s).
- 4. Encouragement.** Prager's moral stance is based on the recognition of the founders that the US form of government is only workable if the populace live morally converted lives (31m45s), calls for the restoration of the “American Trinity” of e pluribus unum, liberty, and In God We Trust (43m15s), and exerts the moral courage to preserve Western civilization in the face of hopeless odds such as those encountered by the troops storming Normandy (45m30s), all in the deliberate choice to fight for something rather than facing the loss of will to fight for anything (39m30s).

3. INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

Intellectual conversion involves a search for truth via Lonergan's critical realism. It is possible that such a desire for truth and rejection of all lies drives both religious and moral conversion, though in reality God subsumes all forms of moral courage and intellectual honesty. To know what is real depends on moral courage to do what is right, and the moral courage to do what is right depends upon God. To know the real is to affirm the existence of God through Judeo-Christian revelations.

JUDGMENT

Although Prager has no formal knowledge either of the realm of interiority or of Lonergan's critical realism epistemology, he applies a purely rational approach not only to the study of Judaism's Tanach but to the task of bringing wisdom into the world. Thus, he can affirm the reality of God without having to “perceive” God as a thing-out-there-to-be-seen. Ditto the reality of values.

EVIDENCE

- 1. Emotions.** Prager has a visceral hatred of lies (5m30s) especially the great lie that Islam is tolerant (5m45s), expresses great joy not only when others share his interest in truth (7m00s) but in debating an intellectually honest person with whom he differs (28m50s), prefers personal openness and transparency over opaque people (7m30s), and respects others for who they are and not just what they say (8m30s).
- 2. Choice.** Prager prefers goodness in others over brilliance and brains (2m30s), finds that it is good in the world that needs to be explained rather than the presence of evil (20m00s), considers Judaism less a matter of faith but of reason (22m00s), is not a naive realist restricting truth to what can be observed (28m30s), possess an historical consciousness of other times and places (Judaism's concern with history: 35m30s), and although highly rational also possess a reflective mentality that lets great question reverberate within (33m00s).
- 3. Enfeeblement.** Prager considers that TV is morally bankrupt (12m30s), that universities in a secular society have deteriorated terribly leaving students morally and intellectually enfeebled (11m50), are moronic, clueless, incapable of thinking, incompetent, childish, immature, incoherent, dominated by feelings, lacking depth, superficiality (13m00s), often says that “you had to go to graduate school to say something that stupid (14m00s), considers Frankfurt's school's critical theory a debasement of critical thinking (15m30s), in Lonergan's terms universities train against the transcendental precepts (15m30s), notes that universities alienate children from the historical values of their parents—such a radical break has never occurred in history (15m30s), a break in which no one reads the bible (unfamiliar with the story of Cain and Abel: 38m30s), observes that judgments can no longer be grounded in reason but instead in feelings and opinions (40m00s), notes that free speech not hate speech effectively eliminates free speech (41m30s), and finally that wisdom is not to be found in universities but only outside academia (20m50s).
- 4. Self Appointed Task.** Prager has taken practical steps in dealing with the failure of universities and TV's failure for moral education: Prager University.

CONCLUSION

Prager's foundational stance exhibits a high degree of religious, moral, and intellectual conversion. This means that his horizon and intentions are well placed for him to make a clear distinction between progress and decline, for such a radical change in self provides a greater capacity than most for holding to the transcendental precepts.