

OBJECTIFYING DENNIS PRAGER'S FOUNDATIONAL STANCE
A Cosmopolis Educational Project: Prager's Differentiated Mind: Patterns of Experience
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The two previous papers have covered Prager's level of conversion as well as his differentiated mind. In this third and final paper, we consider what can be known about his common sense patterns of experience and how these experiences encapsulate both conversion and differentiation. The results are conditional, both upon my own state of conversion and differentiation plus the fact that we have limited our experiment to only one of Prager's many video.

BIOLOGICAL PATTERNS OF COMMON SENSE EXPERIENCE

[T]he pattern is a set of intelligible relations that link together sequences of sensations, memories, images, conations, emotions, and bodily movements; and to name the pattern biological is simply to affirm that the sequences converge upon terminal activities of intussusception or reproduction, or, when negative in scope, self-preservation. Accordingly, the notion of the pattern takes us beyond behaviorism, inasmuch as attention is not confined to external data; it takes us beyond a narrow positivism, inasmuch as the canon of relevance leads us to acknowledge that there is a content to insight; but it observes the canon of parsimony by adding no more than a set of intelligible relations to elements of experience. (p. 206)

Humans are not sessile plants whose lives are spent anchored to one place. Rather we are dynamic animals adapted to the pursuit of prey where our senses keep track of what is going on, our memories provide a store of background information, our imagination projects different courses of action, emotions provide an elemental purposiveness, and all carefully coordinated movements are due to striving accompanied by constant shifts in perception. Maintaining a sound orientation is critical, for a single moment of disorientation or distraction can leave a person or tribe vulnerable to a variety of hazards (a current danger in American politics). So too is the intentionality factor, for whatever we intend to do—or not do—brings into play sensations, memories, images, conations, emotions, etc.

Prager has at least two fundamentally biological patterns going forward in his life. The first is Prager's own status and position that opens up opportunities to reproduce now taken up to a higher cultural level through such things as his daily radio program, YouTube videos, Prager University, the writing of columns and books plus public speaking. The second, again on a cultural level, is self-preservation expressed in terms of the possible if not likely collapse of Western civilization (he gave up the Sabbath to accept this invitation to speak on the topic). Both are conditional upon his own biological success through marriage and career.

THE AESTHETIC PATTERN OF EXPERIENCE

There exists in man an exuberance above and beyond the biological account books of purposeful pleasure and pain. Conscious living is itself a joy that reveals its spontaneous authenticity in the untiring play of children, in the strenuous games of youth, in the exhilaration of sunlit morning air, in the sweep of a broad perspective, in the swing of a melody. (p. 207)

Prager is deeply immersed in the aesthetic pattern of experience. This can be observed in such things as his intense hatred of lies (pain), his pleasure at a well designed layout, his focus on the good that needs explanation while the presence of evil does not (pleasure in knowing the good), his deep involvement with Jewish life and with the Torah (ethical monotheism), his love of classical Western music (conducting), the exhilaration of being a public figure, and perhaps above all the Jewish experience of being taken out of slavery (joy). It can also be observed in his final injunction to hold true to the "American Trinity", a strenuous game of heroic behavior in the face of dire odds. Perhaps most important of all, he plumbs the depths of hell throughout the week and the gates of heaven on the Sabbath: liberation and freedom made manifest.

THE INTELLECTUAL PATTERN OF EXPERIENCE

The aesthetic liberation and the free artistic control of the flow of sensations and images, of emotions and bodily movements, not merely break the bonds of biological drive but also generate in experience a flexibility that makes it a ready tool for the spirit of inquiry. To the liveliness of youth, study is hard. But in the season mathematician, sensitive process easily contracts to an unruffled sequence of symbolic notations and schematic images. In the trained observer, outer sense forgets its primitive biological functions to take on a selective alertness that keeps pace with the refinements of elaborate and subtle classifications. (p. 209)

Prager has delved deeper than most people when it comes to studying the human condition and the precepts of his own Jewishness. This exhibits a level of maturity that certainly extends into an understanding of the Torah (ethical monotheism), continues the search for wisdom in the public world through radio, web, columns, books, and presentations, is given expression in his mastery of Western classical music (conducting orchestras), and years of thought and reflection on the state of American culture and the future of Western civilization. He is in fact a trained observer of American culture refined through decades of interaction with others whose dignity he constantly affirms even though they may be fools in believing this or that, a training that has not only left him highly critical of television (morally bankrupt) but deeply disappointed in universities that no longer seek wisdom in what they have to offer.

THE DRAMATIC PATTERN OF EXPERIENCE

If now we turn to ordinary human living, it is plain that we have to do with neither the biological nor the artistic nor the intellectual pattern of experience. Still, there is a stream of consciousness, and the stream involves not only succession but also direction. Conspicuous in this direction is a concern to get things done. But behind palpable activities, there are motives and purposes; and in them it is not difficult to discern an artistic, or more precisely, a dramatic component. (p. 210)

Dramatic patterns of experience transcend biological, aesthetic, and intellectual patterns by shifting to worlds mediated by meaning geared around the great dramas of the human condition. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, this is the high drama between good and evil, between God and Satan, between a life-affirming and a life-denying generative principle in the fundamental dialectic of all humans as decisions are made concerning positions and counter-positions. Unfortunately, Western culture has over that last century or two deconstructed God while elevating Man to the supreme arbitrator between good and evil and so—lost in a sea of relativism—the very notion of evil has lost its meaning and with it any desire to fight it.

Prager's dramatic pattern revolves around the Jewish historical experience of the exodus given in the Torah and brought into America through such things as the design of the Great Seal of the United States that depicts the Jews leaving Egypt as well as the "American Trinity" of *e pluribus unum*, liberty, and *In God we Trust*. It is the great drama of human freedom vs human slavery, of ethical monotheism vs. pagan relativism, of loving God vs despising everything for which He stands. **Prager's enemy?** "There's a corrosive disease; it's called leftism. Part of it, by the way, is aggressive secularism. But it's not all there is. And we have to fight it." (47m30s) **Prager's goal?** To restore the "American Trinity." This is the dramatic pattern that preoccupies him when it comes to the question of the future of Western civilization.

NOTE

Lonergan's discussion of the functional specialty of foundations covers both conversion and differentiation of mind but not common sense patterns of experience. Yet it is difficult to understand such radical foundational changes without referring to the richness, density, and diversity that attends the realm of common sense where both conversion and differentiation occur as everything is related to human interests and concerns. These patterns of common sense experience give form to the person's public persona (his or her socially and politically constructed "self"), while those radical changes in who the person is take place within one's "real" self, i.e., that conscious state of being that undergoes those radical shifts brought about or described through the "neutral" terms of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion (differentiation of mind may be considered an extension of intellectual conversion). In a sense, these patterns express in a single concrete image the state of being of one's real self manifested in the concrete reality of being human.