

OBJECTIFYING DENNIS PRAGER'S FOUNDATIONAL STANCE

A Cosmopolis Educational Project: Prager's Differentiated Mind

Russell Charles Baker, November 23rd, 2018

This exercise follows the similar one of working out the conversion status of Prager's foundational stance by considering the degree to which Prager has a differentiated mind. We will consider the four primary realms of meaning—mathematical, empirical, common sense, and transcendental—although consideration will be given to others as well such as art (aesthetic) and scholarship.

MATHEMATICS. The realm of mathematics is characterized by pure abstract though devoid of any empirical control mechanisms; the only criteria are self-consistency, in the sense that the operations being carried out are not only complete but contain no paradoxes. In the practical realm, this translates to a basic numerical intelligence often associated with scale: workable plans or policies may not be scalable, i.e., the associated recurring schemes of operation typical of a local craft workshop will not work when it comes to organizing manufacturing at an industrial level, or regulatory schemes appropriate for small groups where everyone knows each other fail when it comes to providing moral standards for a large city or even a civilization.

Evidence: There are no data points that suggest Prager has any mathematical background or appreciation of purely abstract thinking.

Judgment: Prager exhibits no appreciation of pure mathematics. This judgment is conditional, for the topic of his video requires no mathematical understanding.

SCIENCE. The empirical realm is associated with both classical laws (differential equations) and statistics (probabilities) whose abstract theories are subject to the control mediator of empirical testing. Therefore, we look for any appeal to laws relating things to other things, or probabilities associated with any particular stochastic phenomena.

Evidence: There are no data points that reference either universal laws or probabilities.

Judgment: Prager exhibits no appreciation of the empirical sciences within this video.

COMMON SENSE. The realm of common sense lies within unique time-and-space-specific situations, where the intelligent person knows how to get things done when operating within a given time and place.

Evidence: Prager's common sense includes such things as charity (0m30s), self-deprecation (0m45s), a preference for goodness over brains (3m30s), recognition of moral courage (6m15s), openness (transparency, 7m15s), who you are and not what you say (8m15s), keeping the Sabbath (9m45s), gratitude (key to goodness, 10m30s), hosting a talk show (7m00s), publishing articles (3m30s), what you do that is so good (honest praise, 4m30s), different world as a well known person (9m00s), recognizes the enfeeblement of the American mind (12m15s), great respect for human dignity (14m00s), a radical break in history as parents values not be carried down to the next generation (15m45s), establishes Prager University (16m30s), happiness hour on his Friday radio show (17m30s), very involved in Jewish life (21m50s), conducts orchestras (24m30s), no god and there's no objective good or evil (28m30s), awareness of the dangers of unbridled human passion (31m15s), Jews leaving Egypt (core founding narratives, 32m15s), worth while having children and preserving society (35m00s), draws upon the [Hebrew] Bible for the source of wisdom (37m30s), end of the will to fight evil (39m30s), awareness of moral confusion (39m45s), awareness of a deep cultural shift in America with the loss of *e pluribus unum*, In God We Trust, and liberty (44m00s), heroism in the face of overwhelming odds (America, 45m15s), and "it looks bad" (47m00s).

Judgment: We can affirm that Prager is an intelligent person of great common sense. Not only is he an accomplished columnist, radio talk show host, and conductor of orchestras but he is a major player in the on-line educational program known as Prager University. Furthermore, he is deeply aware of the time-and-space-specific historical traditions and current status of American life, especially of the enfeeblement of the American mind and the current incapacity to recognize and fight evil. Finally, he has put into place a public persona that is open and transparent, honors and respects the dignity of others, and is concerned above all with wisdom rather than intellectual brilliance in all that he does—all things that require a great degree of practical intelligence.

TRANSCENDENT. An awareness of the transcendent realm in human affairs starts with the question of the existence of God. If God is affirmed as both real and involved, and the individual falls in love with this source of all goodness, then he or she is aware of the transcendent realm of meaning. However, this is a far cry from being knowledgeable of this realm of meaning and its relationship with other distinct realms.

Evidence: Evidence of Prager's transcendental foundations can be found in a sense of humility (00m45s), of being blessed by god (1m50s), a preference for goodness over mere brains (2m30s), a visceral hatred for lies (5m15s), respect for moral courage (6m15s), a preference for openness in his personal relations (7m15s), holding strictly to the sabbath with rare exceptions if something morally significant comes up (10m00s), anything good on TV? (12m30s), moral bank accounts (13m00s), happy hour even in the midst of much suffering (18m00s), the problem is not how to explain evil in the world but to explain the presence of good (20m00s), deeply involved in Jewish life (21m45s), no objective good or evil without God (28m45s), ethical monotheism (30m45s), consequences of godlessness (demise of marriage, end of the will to fight evil, moral confusion, no personal boundaries, no children: 33m45s), no secular case for anything (35m45s), support of the "American Trinity" (43m15s), the need to fight especially if one is losing (46m00s), and the need to fight aggressive secularism (47m30s).

Judgment: Given the number and range of the data on transcendence, it is clear that Prager's foundational stance revolves around religious conversion. The two definitive data points are that he is deeply involved in Jewish life, and firmly believes that without God there can be no objective good or evil.

ART. An important realm of meaning is that of art, be it visual, audio, or some other form. In some ways, art is like mathematics: it can reveal underlying forms or patterns (recurring schemes of operations) that are not evident in the everyday world. Although it has gone out of fashion, poets were once considered to be at the forefront of human understanding of what it meant to be human.

Evidence: Prager exhibits a recognition of quality and beauty of the readers and the beautiful work the editors put into every single publication (3m15s), beautiful art and photo work (4m00s), conducts orchestras in southern Californian (24m15s), [music] is a very serious pursuit (24m, 45s), and goes to concerts of classical music (25m00s),

Judgment: Although not Prager's primary pursuit, which is the pursuit of wisdom, he does have a deep appreciation of art in general and Western classical music in particular. This gives evidence of a transcendent interest and reaction to the good, however that goodness is expressed.

SCHOLARSHIP. Scholarship is understood as the protracted study of another often radically different culture accompanied by the task of translating that culture's work into a contemporary framework. At its core is the functional specialty of interpretation.

Evidence: Prager references Leviticus [dietary laws] (10m15s), "I thought about this [future of the Western world] my whole life" (11m15s), terrible deterioration of universities (11m50s), television profoundly enfeebled American culture (12m15s), go to graduate school to say something that stupid (14m00s), provides a reading list at Prager University [wisdom] (16m15s), wrote "Happiness Is a Serious Problem" (18m00s), wrote "Why the Jews? The Reason for Antisemitism", now in its third edition (20m50s), columnist for the Jewish Journal of Los Angeles (22m15s), "I have read every book I know of on rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust" (23m15s), "I've debated this [you can only have objective good or evil is there is a god] (28m30s), "honor to debate an intellectually honest person" (28m45s), "I spoke to [the penguins] about ethical monotheism (30m45s), reading Franklin's autobiography (32m30s), the ignorance of the bible at Harvard is profound (38m30s), "It's a matter of opinion" [ethical relativism] (historical awareness among recent generations: 41m00s), the "American Trinity" (43m15s), and a corrosive disease called leftism—aggressive secularism (47m30s).

Judgment: Perhaps not a professional scholar per se, operating out of a university, although the evidence points to the rational mind of a scholar seeking to understand another age, another time. Perhaps he is the equivalent operating under the different conditions of an Internet age. In any case, he is certainly what would have been known as a educated "man of letters."