

MODERN AGE

A QUARTERLY REVIEW



Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life

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I

IT TOOK SOME TIME for Alonzo to see clearly through the philosophy he had espoused for about two decades, the regnant orthodoxy of naturalism.* This philosophy holds, as the kernel of its convictions, that there is nothing beyond nature and that all there is within it can be explained, in principle at least, without appeal to miracles or mysteries or transcending causes. What Alonzo first perceived about it was that naturalism, or the current versions of it with which he was acquainted, ignored heroism, had no sense of the tragic sentiment of life, and what it had to say about death was trivial when it was not altogether irrelevant. Contemporary naturalism was not only an essentially secularistic philosophy but it had no means of responding to the ultimate resonances, to that which men have found awesome and capable of eliciting piety in the universe.

Among the intellectuals at the time when Alonzo was making these discoveries there was a great deal of talk about the "new" naturalism, an improved version of the old

doctrine that was claimed by those who propounded it to avoid the defects of the old. The editor of one of the distinguished quarterlies of the period asked Alonzo for a non-technical account of it that could be read by non-professional philosophers. In the last short section of the essay he submitted, Alonzo sketched succinctly the doubts he had begun to entertain about the adequacy of naturalism. The response to the essay was much stronger than he had anticipated. He received a number of letters that indicated that the essay had been read with dismay by his friends. I asked Alonzo for a full account of the reaction to the essay. "I seem to remember," I said, "that the reaction included more than letters." "Yes, more. But a complete account of an indirect consequence it brought about, besides getting us into too long a story, is not quite relevant to your job." I insisted that it was because I remembered vaguely what had happened. More interesting than the letters he received condemning his "defection" was an indirect response that, he thought at the time, was flattering. A left literary review announced

the forthcoming publication of an essay on pragmatism and tragedy by one of Dewey's chief disciples, Professor Disney Hatén. I insisted that the story was certainly relevant to my job.

He told me that when he submitted the essay he had expected his friends would not like it. Naturalist philosophers are human. Their claims to impersonality and objectivity were not to be taken as binding as rigorously on themselves as on those with whom they disagreed. Some of them were more impersonal and objective than others, but the majority, and certainly Hatén, reacted to disagreement with their views as religious believers do. Alonzo, however, had not anticipated the implacable way in which they would open up on him. They proclaimed the virtue of tolerance, but they acted as if he had changed sides in the middle of a war. He had "defected." Hatén told a friend who passed it on to him that Alonzo had betrayed his naturalism. This way of putting the matter was interesting to Alonzo because it gave away their attitude. A man who defects gives up his allegiance. But Alonzo had never asked to be received in their church or swore fealty to their flag. He had been a Deweyian, but only a Deweyian of sorts, as a serious thinker must be, whether he is a Deweyian, a Kantian, or a Will Durantian. He had been a Deweyian naturalist because he had found in Dewey's writings what he took to be, at the time, the truth about the relation of man to his universe.

But he had never accepted all of Dewey's theories. He had never been interested in Dewey's views on education about which there was so much controversy. He simply ignored these views. And Dewey on human nature was, for Alonzo, a semi-liquid product of his pelagian diarrhea. He had not looked at *Human Nature and Conduct* for a long time, and he was not going to do so now to check, but he remembered, or seemed to, that Dewey had asserted that there was no such thing as the will to power. If you take the term literally this is true, since the expression assumes that

there is a reified organ, like the liver, that produces a force that aims at something, power. But a philosopher should look behind the words for what they are trying to express, perhaps in a defective way. To deny that some men have a drive or thirst or guiding interest towards power over other men gives evidence of inexcusable ignorance of men. Again Dewey gives no evidence, so far as Alonzo remembered the book, of awareness of the shadowing figure of Freud—or more exactly "Freud." I am not saying, he remarked, that Dewey should have accepted "Freudian" theory, but that he should have taken it into account. When he published *Human Nature and Conduct* even illiterate men were already using "Freudian" concepts in their daily intercourse. You can't ignore "Freud," by which I mean what he let loose on the world.

For these reasons Alonzo had never been a true Deweyian. A naturalist he had been, and a wholehearted one. But never in a religious way. If his belief in naturalism was "faith," it was not the kind that would have satisfied an inquisitor. He had never had occasion to state this in print or in public, but those who knew him personally must have known that he was not a trustworthy disciple, since he had never concealed his partial disagreement with thinkers who had influenced him. But was it necessary to say this? A thinker who defects or betrays the thought of a man from whom he has learnt may be a most meritorious father of a family and citizen, he may even be a hero to his valet, but he is no thinker. The question was not whether he had defected or betrayed any views or any one. It was whether the grounds for abandoning his naturalism and whether the views he put in its place held or not. He was loyal, he had always been loyal, but not to a philosophical party or school (which is self-evidently a contradiction in terms) but to his commitment to an objective search that promised to carry him as close to the truth as it was possible for him, given his handicaps, to get. This was the reason

he had moved from one philosopher's counter to another till he found the gewgaws he had confidence were the best available.

The response to his criticism I remembered, but I wanted to get his present attitude to the essay in reply to his criticism, written by his former friend, Professor Hatén. Hatén's essay had been announced immediately after Alonzo's criticism of naturalism appeared, and it finally was made public a number of years later.

First I wanted to have his reaction to the man, for Hatén had published a virulent diatribe against Alonzo, and second I wanted his present views on Hatén's claim that pragmatism did have a theory of the tragic sense of life. Well, Alonzo replied smiling, Hatén's attack on me was his response to a review of mine on his book on education in which I showed up his doctrine for the tawdry philistinism it was. But you must look at the original edition of the book, for I was told by someone who read a subsequent edition that he had deleted several passages I had criticized. To me Hatén's furious diatribe was interesting because it showed that I had put my finger on a spot where his vain soul hurt.

So, in a way, I had it coming. The virulence, however, I did not have coming, but I should have expected it since I knew Hatén well. A man as vain as he is wouldn't put up with what he called my betrayal. Add to the betrayal the truth of my criticism about the lacunae of naturalism and the exposé of the vulgarity of his views on education and you arouse the murderous anger of a vain man. If I had not sized up the situation as I did, he might have hurt me. But all he managed to do was to confirm my judgment of the intellectual vulgarity of the man—something I had suspected long before I saw how it expressed itself. This does not dispose of him. In many important ways he is a very generous person with those who think well of him. He once did me a great favor, which I have never forgotten. But this does not make the picture he has of himself true. His view

of himself is only partly true. Unbeknown to himself he is an implacable dogmatist. Disagree with him and you bring out the vast aggressive energies he is endowed with. So much for the scientific corrigibility he preaches. I trace his intolerant dogmatism to a sense of insecurity he has no reason to have, because in the field of political journalism he has made a deservedly good name for himself. His journalistic talents aside, Hatén is a very human animal, I would say.

But I have said enough on Hatén the man. It is his essay on the pragmatic tragic sense of life on which you should focus. In this essay he asseverates, first, without proof, that Dewey does have a sense of tragedy. How could he lack it? If the tragic sense is a good, Dewey must have had it and indeed he did. How could the *capocosche* of Naturalist Families, the *capo di tutti capi* of contemporary wisdom lovers, the cornucopia of as much of the ultimate truth as is given to men to attain—how could a man like that lack the tragic sense of life? Moreover, Dewey grew in the shadow of the Civil War, and like all men who grew in the shadow of the Civil War, he had the tragic sense of life. The historians who give you a different idea of the age are wrong. Mary Baker Eddy, for instance, ached with the tragic sense of life, and so did the railroad builders and those who after the Civil War trekked West into the unknown, leaving behind them a strong spoor which is characteristic of those who have the tragic sense of life, as animals are said to emanate the smell of fear. Of course Dewey's tragic sense of life was no ordinary tragic sense of life, but how could it be, since it was Dewey's? It was nothing like the tragic sense you find in Aeschylus or Sophocles or find giving force to *King Lear*. It was a pragmatic tragic sense of life, as you would expect from him. And make no mistake, it was not an instrumentalist tragic sense of life, it was a pragmatic one. And it was pragmatic because it worked.

Hatén adds that although what the

phrase describes is implied in Dewey's account of the moral experience, nothing of moment depends on whether the view is actually Dewey's, or Hegel's, or William James' or Nicolai Hartmann's, in all of whom it can be found, for he takes the responsibility for its interpretation and its application. One cannot decide whether it is the phrase or the view that is found in these philosophers, but let that go since it is Haten's view that is in question.

But if nothing of moment depends on whether the phrase or the view is found in Dewey, why is the matter brought up? The statement that Dewey, because he was born in the shadow of the Civil War, felt the tragic sense of life is as relevant as if we had been informed that Dewey had been born with right-angled big toes, like some Nepalese, and during his adolescence he had lived with a sense that he was a freak which, of course, accounted for his humanitarian concern for the underdog. Dewey might have felt the tragic sense of life. But how, in the absence of a discussion in print by Dewey himself of the nature of tragedy, or as second choice, of lecture notes taken by a student, can students of philosophy know that Dewey did indeed feel the tragic sense of life and not an *Ersatz* tragic sense, and what is at least as important, that feeling it in his own life, he incorporated an account of it in his philosophy?

The word tragedy is notoriously used in all sorts of ways. It is used in the classic sense to apply to the lives lived by the heirs of Pelops and the heirs of Oedipus. But it is also used in a cheapened sense to refer to the death of one of Mrs. Goodall's chimps, or to the catastrophic death of seabirds killed by an oil spill. But let us accept the irrelevant fact that Dewey felt the tragic sense, how can the reader bring Dewey's radical optimism, his futuristic outlook, instinct as it was with secular hope, his pelagian denial of "original sin" that he probably absorbed with his mother's milk, his patented pedagogical cure-all bottled in Teacher's College, his

faith that science and social engineering can reduce the evil among men, his faith in progress expressed in the first edition of Dewey and Tuft's *Ethics*, his rigorously restricted sub-lunar purview—how can the reader bring these central components of Dewey's faith into harmony with his tragic sense of life?

No student of philosophy can be expected to take seriously apologetics based on such a biographical assertion; it proves nothing. But even if its irrelevance had not been acknowledged by the author, the question remains: where did Dewey's subjective experience find expression in his published philosophy? If it did not, why didn't it? Do we then have here—a case common enough in the history of humane letters—a thinker who fails to express an important aspect of his vision of the world in his philosophy? This is possible; if so the fact may be important to a biographer of Dewey, but it is totally irrelevant to the student of his philosophy. For the latter, it is only his thought as expounded in books, essays, letters, or student's lecture notes, that is of interest.

II

SO MUCH FOR Haten on Dewey. How does he himself show that the pragmatic purview includes the tragic sense. Since he takes responsibility for the interpretation of the phrase and its application, he is not required to quote what other pragmatists have written on the subject. He cannot go to what he himself wrote before his attention was called to the omission, since before that sad event our warrior, who is fond of asking where were you when he was in the thick of the battle, somehow missed that scrap. Nor can he go to the tragic poets to show that their vision is a component of the pragmatic purview. This door is closed to him, since he has advised young people who want an education for modern man to read the *New York Times* instead of Herodotus—by which one can take him to mean, not the author of the inquiries ex-

clusively but himself and his fellow ancient men of letters. How then does our empiricist sage show that there is within the pragmatic purview room for the tragic sense of life? It is hard to believe, but this advocate of empiricism stipulates the meaning. So much for our empiricist's use of the scientific method.

He asks, "What do I mean by the tragic sense of life and what is its relevance to pragmatism?" He answers that by the term he means "a very simple phenomenon of the moral choice." What is tragic in the moral choice? The fact that when we ask, "What should I do?" we find ourselves in a situation where good conflicts with good, or our good with the good of another, or others, or between goods and rights, or between rights and rights. On the stipulated definition of our pragmatist, life turns out to be through and through tragic, since even for the most powerful and most fortunate of men, even for the best regulated routine, even for the most customary and well habituated existence, it involves choice. But our pragmatist escapes the meaninglessness of the universality of tragedy by pointing out that just as there are little deaths there are little choices. It is only the big choices that are truly tragic. We are told that it is where the choice is between goods that are complex in structure and consequential for the future, that the tragic quality of the moral dilemma emerges more clearly. The reader no doubt will be relieved by the quantitative criterion and especially by the fact that the criterion makes tragedy a choice that is consequential for the future and not for the past. This makes it easier for us to decide when we are caught in a tragic choice.

We have long had Humpty Dumpty's authority, now indirectly reinforced by Webster III, to the effect that we can use words as we choose to and not as someone else does. This is a little tragedy which is no tragedy at all, but a great boon. But if we define tragedy as our pragmatist does, how do we distinguish serious human catastrophes, a profound but honest error

in a moral decision, and an unfortunately erroneous but honest practical choice from a choice that is complex and consequential—or complex in structure and consequential for the future, if one must have the bafflegab and the pleonasm—how does one distinguish these sufferances and endurances, from truly tragic events, which is to say, from events called tragic in the classical sense? If one of these events is complex and consequential it is tragic by stipulation. But are there no choices that are complex and consequential that can hardly be called tragic except by our pragmatist's stipulation? Let us see.

Consider a man trying to choose between two women to whom he is equally attracted so far as he can discern, who are in every respect equal: equal in his affection for them and their affection for him, equal in their beauty, charm, grace, personality, in their intelligence if that is a factor that counts with him, in what they may contribute towards a future home economically, although that factor may not be one to which he gives great weight, in short in every trait that for him is important. Such a man is faced with a choice that is complex and consequential. But shall we say, Humpty Dumpty aside, that whom-ever he chooses, his choice is tragic? He may regret that he cannot marry both of them; sometimes, not often, he may regret that both women being equally moral, he cannot suggest to both that, since he cannot choose between them, the satisfactory solution, since they both love him, is for them to set up a *ménage à trois*; he may, in an idle moment, wish he were living in Utah in the days of old when men were men and women were plenty. But are we to say that he is confronted with a tragic choice? A sensible man would not allow himself such a melodramatic statement—even to himself.

A man who calls all choices, of whatever kind, however complex and consequential, tragic, because they involve renunciation and sacrifice, is like a child whose mother finds crying disconsolately.

What are you crying about, Johnny, my pet, asks his mother gently. I am crying, he says between heart-rending sobs, because I ate one of my lollypops and now I have one less. But Johnny, his mother says, still gently, if you ate one you have one less, and if you wanted as many as you had before you ate one, you should not have eaten one. But I want to have it and I wanted to eat it, and I can't have it if I eat it, and I can't eat it if I want to have it, he cries, stamping his foot now, his mood turning to rage.

In serious discourse, one of the implicit duties of the thinker is the preservation of the health of the language he uses. T. S. Eliot and Allen Tate have written that the preservation of the language from the erosion from which it constantly suffers is the duty of the poet. But it is also the duty of all responsible writers and thinkers. And this, for reasons too obvious to state explicitly. Erase distinctions for the sake of making a point and you willfully and irresponsibly contribute to the erosion of your instrument. A man who leaves his tools overnight on the lawn is not a man for whom a fellow worker can have respect. A man who erases necessary distinctions is open to criticism. And come the revolution, by and by there will be a classless state, and in such a utopia men who destroy language will be considered enemies of the people.

III

LET ME TURN NEXT, Alonzo went on to say, to the substance of our pragmatist's definition of the tragic sense. It does not call for a profound or extensive knowledge of the history of philosophy to recall that what our pragmatist has presented us with is a rip-off from Hegel. You recall that for Hegel the essential nature of tragedy—and Alonzo pointed out that he was following Hegel here almost verbatim—resides in the opposition worked out in its finest way by Sophocles following Aeschylus, in the body politic, between the ethical life in its social universality and the family as the ground of moral relations. This is the reason that for Hegel the *Antigone* is the most perfect of

Greek tragedies. That other ancient masterpieces can be subjected to the same misreading should not surprise anyone who has witnessed an intelligent interpreter force a poem down on the procrustean bed of his a priori definition and chop off its legs to make it fit his bed. Thus Hegel tells us that the *Agamemnon* is a tragedy because Agamemnon, by sacrificing his daughter, shatters the bond of love between himself and his daughter, which his wife, Clytemnestra, retains in the depths of her mother's heart, and in revenge prepares an ignominious death for her husband on his return. True, or almost true—so far as it goes. With the *Antigone* Hegel has an easier time. The tragedy consists of the conflict between Antigone's reverence for the ties of blood relationship and Creon's exclusive recognition of Zeus, the paramount power of public life and the commonwealth. Again, true, or almost true—so far as it goes.

This is not the occasion, Alonzo continued, to examine exhaustively the inadequacy of Hegel's reading of these two tragedies. Suffice to indicate in haste that the defect consists of overlooking the transcendent or cosmic element in both tragedies. The origin of the *Agamemnon*—the matter for it—is an ancient myth with which, in its various forms, we can assume the spectators were acquainted. The tragedy began with the crimes of the heirs of Pelops which led to a conflict among the gods, a conflict as important an element of the tragedy as the crimes of the heirs of Pelops and Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter. It is therefore erroneous to overlook the fact that the tragedy takes place on two planes, the human and the divine, which the reader remembers, merge in the last play of the trilogy. In the *Antigone* the transcendent element is made explicit by Antigone in the opening lines of the play when she reminds Ismene that they are the victims of the curse of Oedipus. Hegel's interpretation maims both tragedies by overlooking the transcendent element, conveyed later by Scheler in the statement that

tragedy is an essential element of the universe itself—a fact that only a very careless reader or a great thinker armed with a definition that he claims wrongly that he drew from the ancient tragedies, can overlook. But tragedy is an essential element of the universe in a sense that a naturalist—who believes that everything that happens is part of nature—would deny. What Scheler means is that the human events that constitute the tragedy are connected morally and not merely by means of value free causal connections with the universe.

Antigone was punished, if men of today can call it punishment, for a crime she did not commit. But she was also punished by Creon because she willfully violated his edict. Less evidently than in the *Oresteia*, but obviously enough, the *Antigone* takes place on two planes. This may create a difficulty for contemporary logicians who may hold that if Antigone was fated to be punished as a victim of the curse of Oedipus, she could not have defied Creon's edict freely. If we seek what is to be found in the play we can either ignore the contradiction or ignore the play.

If we remember that for Hegel human history is part of the procession of the dialectic towards a cosmic end, one can argue in his defense that his understanding of tragedy is not totally crippling, for the events that take place on the human stage are, in the context of his system, related meaningfully—and not merely in terms of value free cause and effect—to the on-going movement of the universe.

Alonzo went on, "You can see why I say that Haten's version of tragedy is a watered down rip-off from Hegel. Since for the pragmatist the phenomenon of moral choice arises from men's needs and desires and the conflicts these generate within man and among men, the tragic sense for the pragmatist is indeed a very simple thing, that under no circumstances can be taken to be an essential part of the universe itself as Scheler means it. If you take the tragedy to be an essential part of the universe itself, you give the enlightened pragmatist

evidence that you are a victim of anthropomorphic superstition. The grasp of the relation between tragic events and the universe itself has been widely taken to be, again somehow, by victims of anthropomorphic superstition, evidence of profound vision. A few men in a few cultures—for not all cultures and not all men in those in which tragedies were produced—have grasped, or thought they grasped, the tragic relation; "somehow," because it is not a question of knowledge in the narrow sense, about which there is on principle a causal explanation. It is a question of obscure and complex responses of a profoundly disquieting nature to human events that elicit cosmic terror, reverence, and piety, and that somehow elicit expression and find relief through genuine tragedies—which is to say, through tragedies in the classical sense.

When a critic calls attention to the fact that there is no room within the purview of naturalism for the tragic vision and for the modes of expression for which it is the matter, he refers to considerably more than conflicts, however stubborn and however productive of human woe, within man or among men. For this reason the pragmatist's reply is either intellectually irresponsible or myopic. The critic of naturalism may be wrong. If naturalism is true the universe is value free and human conflicts cannot have an essential, moral relation to the universe itself; they can only have a causal relation. Tragedy, in the naturalist's view, unless he is a follower of Humpty Dumpty, is ruled out by his conception of the universe.

Because this is the node of the issue it is desirable to show up the phoney empiricism of our pragmatic sage. Men capable of the tragic vision in the classic sense of the term, and not in the *ad hoc* Humpty Dumpty sense our pragmatist stipulates, derive their conception of the nature of human life from experience. It is what they learn about life at first hand or from reflection on the vicissitudes of others that forces on them the conviction that life

seldom if ever permits a permanent union with the bitch Happiness who, when she happens to pick them up for a moment of joy, soon abandons them. From this bitter lesson the majority of men seek escape by turning their eyes on a life to come after the miseries they endure here and now. Others turn their hope to a golden age in the future, a utopia free from iniquity and avoidable pain. But some men—not many and only in a few cultures of our West—for how it is in the East I do not know—free from secular chiliastic delusions and perspicuous enough to see that human catastrophes cannot always be traced to failure of human judgment, leap mythically or literally, and attribute the condition of man to the nature of the universe in which they think they discern a flaw which denies the Whole to be a Cosmos and to which they trace the source of human misery. It is a leap prompted by what they observe men endure. The leap may land them in an egregious error; if the universe is value free, it does. But it is no more of a leap than that which the pragmatist takes. For this man, along with his fellow naturalists, extends the demands of physical science to the Whole and declares that it is value free. Such an assertion about the Whole cannot be based on experience, for the obvious reason that it is given to no man, not even to a scientific pragmatist, to survey the Whole.

The man endowed with the tragic vision in the classic sense lashes out at the Whole; it is not a Cosmos, for at its heart there is a flaw. He is only an empiricist of sorts, but he is an empiricist nevertheless, for he starts out from the observation of what men endure. In this important respect, the pragmatist is not an empiricist, for he rules out the classical notion of tragedy a prioristically on the basis of a non-empirical theory about the Whole, namely on his scientific theory that it is value free.

This faith of our pragmatist is probably what accounts for his inability to see human life against the background of the

Whole. Hence the banality of his notion of tragedy. Did I say, banality? I did, but it is much worse than that; it is more like infantilism, since a man in his maturity takes in his stride the fact that to live is, among other things, to give up a good for the sake of another. To give up a good for the sake of another equally desired or needed may, at worst, be catastrophic; a tragedy, if one has respect for language, it never is.

Let me call your attention to an obvious matter that is, nevertheless, of great importance. The experience produced by reading or witnessing a tragedy cannot be conveyed by descriptive language. The experience must be lived in the actual reading or witnessing the tragedy. I cannot tell you, in abstract descriptive terms how the witness of *King Lear* feels as he hears and sees the events develop of this vast affair. Nor can I tell you how Lear the King or Gloucester or the others feel as the events develop. When I say that while witnessing you feel that vast forces of evil are closing in on Lear, that the world around him, nature as well as the human world, is crowded with threatening evil that has picked him to destroy him, my words cannot give you the faintest idea of what you feel or what Lear conveys that he feels when, in the middle of the story (act III, scene ii) Lear turns on the skies and cries

I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness.

I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,

You owe me no subscription.

But we know better. For all of Lear's exculpation, we know, if we are attending raptly to what is going on on the stage, that the storm is an expression of universal evil bent on destroying a man.

This is sheer anthropomorphism. But by sitting on your seat before the curtain rises on act I, scene i, you left your facile value free universe along with your overcoat in the checking room. That the universe is somehow out to destroy a man is an an-

thropomorphic irrationality. The universe is value free, or so we are assured by naturalists who know. And the horrors of history? the misery of men? the bestiality of the Holocaust? the helplessness of so much that is essentially untoward in the universe?—what does our pragmatist say about this? He must dismiss it, since the question assumes a false interpretation. The question assumes the universe is not value free. That is rhetoric, and meaningless rhetoric at that, since by applying your reason aided by “the” scientific method we can avoid many of the evils that until the appearance of John Dewey and his enforcer visited men.

IV

THE DEFECT of our pragmatist’s effort to meet the criticism of naturalism is obvious; moreover it is disingenuous. In order to show its disingenuousness Alonzo invented a fable. Let’s imagine, he suggested, an argument between a patriotic Englishman who cherishes the monarchy and an American jingoist. The Englishman criticizes the United States because it does not have a queen. This is not difficult to imagine when one remembers that the *niaiserie* of which narrow partisans are capable are apt to bloom with tropical luxuriance. But the fable need never have had a real model, since its purpose is to show how disingenuous our pragmatist is.

“We have no queens?” the American jingoist snarls. “That shows how ignorant critics of the greatest country in the world are. You know nothing about us or you would know that we have dozens of queens, literally dozens, whereas you English have only one, a plain faced skirt that wouldn’t have the smallest chance of placing in a contest with one of our queens. The beauty and the sexual power of our queens must be seen to be believed. No queen in English history has ever come close to any of our queens. What is more, our queens are crowned yearly and are universally admired. We have a queen of potatoes, a queen of onions, a queen of oranges, a

queen of frankfurters, a queen of tulips . . . you name it and the chances are I can show you we have a queen to fill your bill. And you say we have no queens!”

Obvious as it must be, Alonzo continued, we must look at what the American jingoist has done. He has pretended to himself and anyone silly enough to take him seriously, that there is a substantial equivalent between what in the United States are called queens and what traditionally have been called queens in monarchies. But as Giovanni Sartory puts it in *Democratic Theory*, “To make things verbally alike only makes them *verbally* alike.”

Alonzo turned to me with a face that did not succeed in concealing his sense of triumph and asked, “Elementary, my dear biographer? Of course, utterly elementary, but not unnecessary, since what the jingoist wants to do is to me-too himself into a class where he does not belong by means of verbal alchemy. What he should have replied to the English monarchist was something like this: ‘You are quite right, we have no queens—not consecrated janes like your queen. We abolished that kind of useless ornamental ribbon-cutter and king breeder when we kicked you out. We have dames we call queens. But these dames are not queens in your sense of the term. What we have done by calling them queens is to borrow the prestige of the old word. This is not an illegitimate trick; it fools no one and it makes our queens feel happy. But no one in the whole extent of this blessed cotton-picking land is so ignorant as to believe that what we call queens are queens in your archaic and, to a democrat, ridiculous if not odious, sense of the term. The word endures and the prestige that it had originally and still has among you monarchists still clings to it among us. For that reason we use the term. We call our young women, selected competitively, queens, to indicate they are superior. But a queen, like the woman you call queen, the woman who is married to a king or to a stud quasi-king and has been consecrated according to ancient ceremonies—that kind of luxury we

do not have. What is more, I dare say that outside of a small minority of kooks and weirdos, were anyone to propose seriously that we should change our form of government and bring in a monarchy in order to have a real queen, he would be laughed at.”

“This is the kind of answer our pragmatist should have given the critic when the latter wrote that within the purview of naturalism there was no room for tragedy, the sentiment, the vision that informs some kinds of acts and sufferances, and some aesthetic spectacles. He should have said: ‘Naturalism excludes the tragic sense because it holds that the universe is value free and value is a result of human desire and need. We have abolished tragedy in your sense, because you hold that tragedy is an essential part of the universe itself, and such a belief is anthropomorphic superstition.’ The pragmatist could have added that since words are not copyrighted, there is no dishonesty in using the term tragedy as anyone wishes to use it, so long as the user makes fully explicit that in using the word tragedy in his way he is using it in a totally different way than it was used in the classic sense, and so long as he makes it emphatically clear that he is not claiming for what he calls tragedy the virtues that are claimed for it by the old users.

Had he been fully honest he would have admitted that his philosophy cannot claim for it virtues it does not have and that for him are not virtues but expressions of superstition. A serious thinker does not cheat; he avoids giving the impression of cheating. To claim that pragmatism is capable of the tragic sentiment without a full and emphatically explicit clarification of what he can claim for his philosophy as well as what he cannot, is objectively—whatever his subjective motivations—cheating. A serious thinker has no need of me-tooing his philosophy where it does not belong. He accepts the limitations inherent in his position, aware that no philosophy is under the obligation of doing in any one respect what other philosophies do. He might remind his

readers that claims to the contrary notwithstanding, all philosophies entail limitations. Indeed a serious thinker should glory in the limitations of his philosophy. He defends the truth of his views without inventing for them virtues they cannot have and that from his point of view are indeed not virtues. To defend a philosophy *à l’outrance* is to put himself on the plane with lawyers who argue to win, not to discover the merits of a case.”

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ALONZO ADDED that this is not all he had to say about the pragmatist who had tried to refute his criticism. He came back to the fact that pragmatists are neo-pelagians and that our pragmatist had called himself a pelagian in print. But pelagians, neo or paleo, are optimists in principle who believe, as our pragmatist argues, that “the method of creative intelligence” can reduce at least in part if not entirely, the evil that makes the warp of human history. This in turn means that what our pragmatist calls tragedy is a very simple thing that is only waiting for social engineers to do away with or to meliorate. But even if human conflicts are found in practice to be ineradicable, are they not quite a distance from the myths the great tragic poets wove into their tragedies?

“Why do you keep on rubbing in the business of tragedy being a very simple thing?” I asked Alonzo. “You know that the man you call our pragmatist does not mean by thing a physical thing and that he calls it simple, probably, in order to remove it from the cosmic plane and keep it within the body politic in which the ethical life in its universality comes into conflict within man and among men.” “The reason I rub it in,” Alonzo replied, “is to call emphatic attention to the flat-footed language of the man. Whatever the exact relation between language and thought is taken to be, this much we can say with confidence, that he who writes without grace, he who writes in a flat-footed way, thinks

in that way. Our pragmatist writes without grace, without inspiration, always at sea level or below it, never above it. When he feels inspired—have you ever seen a hen trying to fly? It's a sight. It flaps its wings in desperate vigor, it runs, it jumps, it reaches the height of a foot or two, and still trying desperately it falls to the ground. Our pragmatist has no sense of history or of the value of history, or he would not have advised a young man in search of an education to read the *New York Times* instead of Herodotus. The advice gives superfluous evidence of how much you can learn about the nature of man from the best daily paper or the worst.”

Alonzo changed his attitude. The seriousness of naturalism's failure to recognize the tragic component of experience, using the

term, not in an *ad hoc* me-too sense, but in its classical sense, cannot be exaggerated. An adequate philosophy, one equal to the requirements of a whole man, not of a man with vision dimmed by scientific faith and pelagian optimism, neo or paleo, should have something to say about that cluster of values and disvalues that men cannot successfully turn their face from. If a philosophy ignores these values and disvalues, sooner or later the dour components of human experience will catch up with the ostriches that espouse it, as it had caught up with himself.

*In three issues of *Modern Age* (1975, 1977) there appeared a quasi-biography of a friend, Alonzo Quijano. The present essay is drawn from this biography.

Emerging Conservatism: *Kilpatrick, Morley, and Burnham*

H E N R Y R E G N E R Y

THE POSTWAR conservative movement, it can be said without too much simplification, grew out of two impulses: the attempt to strengthen traditional institutions and attitudes as forces in modern life, and a reaction against those "new modes and orders," to use a phrase beloved by Willmoore Kendall, which had already changed and threatened to alter beyond recognition the structure of American society. Both aspects of modern conservatism are clearly evident in three remarkable books on American government which appeared within two years of one another in the late fifties: Felix Morley's *Freedom and Federalism* (1959), James Jackson Kilpatrick's *The Sovereign States* (1957), and James Burnham's *Congress and the American Tradition* (1959). The books are rather different in style and in their approach to the problem of government—a problem, Burnham says in his book, which "is insoluble yet is solved," but all three were written by men of strong convictions whose respect for the traditional American method of reconciling order with freedom derives from a profound knowledge of its history. That these three books were written almost at the same time and not long after the administrations of Franklin D.

Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman is evidence not only of the vitality of the American governmental tradition, but the depth as well of the realization that it was gravely threatened.

When he wrote *The Sovereign States*, James Jackson Kilpatrick was editor of the *Richmond (Virginia) News-Leader*. This book may properly be considered, I think, the Southern reply to *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court decision of May 17, 1954, which undertook to put an end to racial separation in the public schools. While the school decision was the immediate stimulus to the writing of the book, its concern is with the much larger issue of the usurpation by Washington of the authority of the states. In his Introduction Kilpatrick sets out his position with complete frankness:

May it please the court, this is not a work of history; it is a work of advocacy. The intention is not primarily to inform, but to exhort. The aim is not to be objective; it is to be partisan.

I plead the cause of States' rights.

My thesis is that our Union is a Union of States; that the meaning of this