

Two Roads to Ignorance, A Quasi Biography by
Eliseo Vivas, Carbondale, Southern Illinois
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In *Two Roads to Ignorance*, Eliseo Vivas dramatizes his intellectual history in the manner of a “novel of ideas.” As the interlocutor poses questions and elicits the narrative, the reader begins to welcome each idea, each *boutade*, and even the *obiter dicta* and the verbal hide-and-seek as part of the unfolding “plot.” Thus Vivas’s Alonzo—distinguished by the z (without mentioning matters of a personal nature) from Alonso Quijano or Don Quixote—manages steadily to take on “character,” to emerge as an embodiment of ideas. If, disillusioned, the original Alonzo returns home to repent, Vivas’s Alonzo returns home to make his stand in this polemical book. Although in strict philosophy Alonzo has to give up his Dulcinea, I argue that she is, indeed, present in the book, not above the battle but in the battle, in more than a merely virtual way.

This quasi-biography, we are told, was meant to be objective, the events being “true” if not, necessarily accurately recorded. It was meant also to be representative. To be sure, Vivas suggests, were old-fashioned titles still acceptable, *Two Roads to Ignorance* would read as *Alonzo Quijano’s Squatting in Morningside Heights, His Trip to Moscow’s City Limits and His Safe Return Home*: “the story of a man who started with a great deal of cocksure confidence about his knowledge of the ills of society and of the nature of the universe and ended up by having to recognize that he knew very little besides the fact that he did not know, because genuine knowledge about these matters does not exist” (IX).

Alonzo considers himself an “empiricist”; and in this spirit his intellectual history is shaped not by bloodless transactions between ideas, but by encounters between a man of flesh and blood and other men like himself caught up in contending groups from the period of the Great Depression through the Spanish Civil War and *débaclé* of France before the forces of Hitlerism. Alonzo warns us that, although the main characters in the drama are presented in disguises, some of them will be recognizable as persons either locally or nationally well-known; and, in some instances, unavoidably, actual names appear. Still another category of characters are blends—caricatures in fact—of various people some readers will have known made up with the attitude of a Georg Gross. Finally there are images of people Alonzo has tried in vain to forget, usually composites so calculated that the over-inquisitive reader will draw the wrong portrait.

More discernable, however, are the “two roads” to ignorance. I have managed to map them out here. First, the road that seemed to offer genuine knowledge,

which, could it be truly worthy of a name, is the function of philosophy passing through the various stages of Alonzo's struggle "to know": logical positivism up to a point, instrumentalism, even a neo-Kantian idealism and then finally centered in the complete naturalistic system offered by John Dewey. Those were the lights that failed Alonzo. Though seemingly well-lit, this much traveled road, he decided, led to no conclusion that lived up to its promises of empiricism. The second road also led to what Alonzo calls ignorance because it ended in "mystery." But this road was alive and it beckoned toward something (Alonzo never succeeded in *knowing* exactly what) which seemed to demand response to its "requiredness" and espousal on the moral level, recognition of a certain excellence on the aesthetic level, and gratitude (though also sometimes repulsion) on the religious level. In the presence of this mystery Alonzo felt compelled to counter-attack those travelers on the first road, that alliance of philosophical naturalism and liberalism which confidently insisted on the literal and operative "truth" of what for Alonzo philosophical thought, as well as events, had discredited as nothing more than "fate." Perhaps what irked Alonzo most was the assumption by sectaries in this orthodoxy that their "truth was practically self-evident for men of brains and character." They were sure they had a corner on the market; but for all their good will and protestations of good intention, they became for Alonzo the dangerous enemies of Western culture.

The paramount question implicit in all this is, What does it mean to "know" and what can we know? Let me digress: I have not been trained as a philosopher but as a teacher of literature and the theory of literature. And yet, in more than a decade of friendly dialogue with Eliseo Vivas concerning such fundamental questions in his works, *Creation and Discovery*, *The Artistic Transaction*, his volume on D. H. Lawrence, and the recent article on Dostoevski and on tragedy, I have had to educate myself in the arduous discipline. Inevitably our dialogue has revolved around the problem of knowledge since the experience of poetry in its "resident" value is "rapt apprehension," a form of perception that, ideally, grasps a value and meaning "subsisting" in reality but brought into "existence" by the poet for our use *in* and *through* the literary work; whence, in a somewhat diluted form, it creates the "world" of our culture.

But the progress of *Two Roads to Ignorance* is, if not in the rejection of all philosophizing, an abandonment of faith in philosophy's capacity to answer satisfactorily "first and last questions." Hence, in a "Platonic sense," Alonzo is left with "opinions," among which are "opinions on questions of aesthetics" which, "though held seriously, are mere opinions with emphasis on the *mere*." It is in this rather frustrating predicament that Alonzo wages war on the enemies of Western culture. Does he act and judge as though he knew more than he claims? Let us watch the "plot" develop toward this climax or, rather, this *impasse*.

In the early twenties of this century, the son of a Venezuelan refugee from the dictatorship of Gomez arrived in New York to study engineering. The young man had already passed through the "protracted trauma" of separation from the Roman Catholic Church. Already, he had accepted, in its "incoherent totality," the liberal credo of the era. Always a rebel and a dreamer, a quixotic character not too seriously tied to the world of things and facts, it was a new experience for the young man to meet in an English class the tacit approval of none other than Joseph Wood Krutch, one of the few "liberals" he was to know as truly liberal.

Torn between literature and philosophy, Alonzo found what he needed in Unamuno's *Sentimiento trágico de la vida*: a heterodox believer who took questions of religion seriously, a man of flesh and blood agonizing over the issues of man's mortality. Don Miguel's insistence on the truly tragic nature of *King Lear* was to sow in Alonzo a seed that grew into the proverbial baobab tree.

Friedrich Nietzsche, more than a support for Unamuno, confirmed Alonzo's instinctual sense that philosophy must be far more than a pleasant intellectual exercise. Ideas such as the "death of God," Alonzo remarks, cause seismic commotions in a culture. God's niche is now open and, if a loathsome idol is not to fill it, the whole man must become engaged in the quest of the means, under the new conditions, to give value to the life of man. Yet it took the young Alonzo some time to realize that behind Nietzsche's revulsion at European culture there was a deep piety and to see that "we, men of the West . . . murdered Europe" (p. 25).

Alonzo's map for the quest was soon drawn in its main directions. The quest was to be philosophic in nature but involve the whole man, active in the crisis of his culture. It was to be dominated by "reason," in a sense defined for Alonzo by Morris Cohen at the College of the City of New York; and that "reason" was to be made manifest in the series of volumes on *The Life of Reason* issued by a Spaniard at Harvard, George Santayana. The latter had the additional grace of a knowledge of art from the inside, but the prose seemed a little too precious to Alonzo and the argument never really came to grips with the issue: How could mind, treated only as an epiphenomenon (that is, unable really to interfere in a blind natural process) really affect that process said to be capable of attaining an ideal development under that mind's guidance?

A scholarship took Alonzo to Midland State University, that is, the University of Wisconsin at Madison (we shall allow ourselves this single obvious identification) where under the competent and scholarly instruction of two teachers he himself names—perhaps the only true teachers he found in the upper ranks of the philosophy department—E. B. McGilvary and F. C. Sharp, he gave breadth and depth especially to his study of ethics. The latter especially, with a methodology carefully worked out, though not as empirical as he thought, made a valuable effort within his very utilitarianism to discover the

"unity of the moral consciousness" of the race. Yet in Alonzo's opinion—and here we run up against the two *invariants* of Eliseo Vivas's demands upon a "genuine" philosophy—he could never define, beyond the possibility of disagreement, the "useful" and also seemed personally closed to the "need for a heroic dimension in human beings" and, despite the insights of a Bishop Butler and an Immanuel Kant, to the sense of "ought" as a categorial obligation. For Alonzo, on the contrary, the "ought often transcends any reasonably conceived sense of what is or is not useful at the present or a later time," while the exclusive emphasis upon adaptation even in the process of evolution overlooks the behavior of men through the ages in instances to which we respond with admiration but which cannot be proved to have "survival value." Furthermore, Alonzo, whose "empiricism" always involves a comparison between a man's theories and his conduct, detected in Sharp the "conservative" and John Dewey the "liberal," a nobility and a magnanimity in behavior not really provided for in their ethical theory. But, alas, more often the contradiction between theory and practice held surprises only of an unpleasant sort, as in the cases of the "liberal." Alonzo knew liberal friends whose egotism, unscrupulousness in classroom propaganda and personal pettiness ran counter to their high expectations of ordinary human nature. In the philosophy department at Madison, for example, Alonzo encountered a philosopher who was the personification of everything he detested most in Academia. He first served the philosopher ("Maxie Waxie") as a student assistant and later, in the Depression years, when the philosopher became chairman of the department and he, the successful young professor, a *persona non grata* to be cast adrift when possible. (The imminent danger of being in the path of Maxie Waxie kept Alonzo publishing in order not to perish and actually landed him in *Who's Who*. In later years, he could walk out of Madison with a choice and a sense of having accomplished something professionally better).

No one who reads the *Two Roads* will forget Maxie Waxie, etched by a hatred all the more perfect for its control. "Amoral," in the sense that he knows his heart is pure and therefore justifies every motive and act, this erstwhile "evangelist" in Salvation Army blue, in a complete turnabout, employed "superior rhetorical powers in dishing out a thin gruel he took to be philosophic wisdom—relativism and atheism," adulterated out of John Dewey and William James. Hating the logic he had been assigned to teach, he urged his students "to concern themselves with actual human needs," as if the mind had no needs. He "disparaged the value of systematic, technical thought and interest in close reading, carried out with careful attention to the demands of evidence and method," meanwhile impugning the good faith of those who disagreed with him or lessened in any way a prickly sense of security. He actually seemed to see himself as a dangerous man and a man in danger, a kind of Stephen Trofimovitch Verhovensky in Dostoevski's *The*

Possessed. For all his detestation of social distinctions, he became one of the two or three most powerful men at the University thanks to a friendship with a politician of a ruling family in Wisconsin; and he naturally ended up with the highest salary as chairman of the department. Yet it must be admitted many an undergraduate found his way into the philosophy department thanks to his rather "corny" sense of humor and a common touch in his eloquence. Nevertheless, the success of a Maxie Waxie and others of his stamp forced upon Alonzo the melancholy recognition that even a distinguished University was not necessarily, "in academic terms, an essentially honest world" (p. 64).

The philosopher as "inspirational" Alonzo balances with the philosopher as partisan, the man from the eastern big city set up with the man from America's "midlands." Professor Disney Hatén he dubs Prime Minister of King John the first of Instrumentalia, heresy hunter, preserver and enforcer of the true faith—excuse me, "of verifiable and corrigible knowledge" (which turns out in his lifetime to need little or no correction), "*the scientific method*," sometimes called by the "value-free term of creative intelligence," and pedalled by Hatén as the panacea for all disease, moral and political, private and public. One can only suggest Alonzo's outrage when his *Alteza* read a paper on the "betrayers" of John Dewey, as though one were talking not philosophy but prophecy or the party-line (p. 273).

The second portrait evidently came from the second phase of Alonzo's professional life. He had decided to "*mettre tout en cause*," as a Frenchman once said an honorable man must do at least once in his life; and it cost him in personal relations and in professional life. Alonzo as critic and philosopher was a *poet manqué*. We have the portraits as evidence and also, perhaps more fundamentally, what I shall call a certain "visceral" depth in his responses. He tells how, hardly more than a boy, in a New York armory in World War I, as he listened to the injunction to prospective soldiers not to shoot until "they could apply their fire where it counted," he had felt the phrase "cut through his mind, split his head like a hatchet and made him reel. . . . The throat-clutching insanity of the episode he had just lived through, the brutality, the monstrous disregard of human life surged to his consciousness and left him fainting. . . . For a few days he was not quite himself" (pp. 16-17).

We are struck also by the "visceral" quality of the reaction to a human being's hunger. Back in Madison after a year's leave from Wisconsin to study the German language (June 1930-31), just when Hitler was rising to power, Alonzo found it possible to offer coffee, bacon and eggs to an embarrassed and hungry man. He *perceived* the meaning of Depression. (I italicize because I invite comparison between this experience taken from "real life," to what Eliseo Vivas claims for "rapt apprehension" of a work of art. "He could not get the memory of the incident out of his mind for days; and the more he thought about it, the more anxious, angry and frightened he became. Frightened

of what? Of nothing specific for himself . . . but what emerged in the long run was anger . . . steady, gnawing, bitter anger . . . and for weeks and months . . . it brought inward emptiness and a dry pull of the throat that was an acute physical pain" (p. 109).

This was the kind of experience, Alonzo remarks, which the Communists were to exploit in an intense propaganda leading in a few years to a collective hysteria, a mass panic among a large number of intellectuals. Hitler was aided by the Depression—all grist to the mill of Communism, fed soon by Franco and the Fascist invasion of Madrid, with only the Communists taking sides with the Spanish Republic. Having returned to Madison, Alonzo became active in the Teachers' Union and the Spanish Committee formed to aid the Republic. But the Teachers' Union, soon controlled by Stalinists, became the tool of agitation for domestic causes in general and against the University, state and federal authorities. Willing to co-operate with the Communists in aid of the Spanish Republic, Alonzo nevertheless refused to join the Party, those "friends of liberty" who themselves goose-stepped, expelled the undisciplined, and methodically assassinated their characters. Not solely because of political ideas absorbed from Dewey or from his long association with liberals, nor as the result of reading *The Nation* since 1917 and the *New Republic* since 1920, Alonzo had drifted to the Left. It was the thorough awakening of a sensibility which from early childhood in Caracas had been "liberal." "Unconsciously he had been a Quixote. Although quite capable of cruelty and injustice in his behavior toward others, there were some acts of cruelty or injustice that, when committed by others, he could not stomach. But it was a sense of the permanent and ubiquitous presence of injustice and cruelty in the past and in contemporary experience but also in himself and in men of reforming temperament that had made him unable to share the prevalent optimism of the *Weltgeist* before 1914." Now, one of the factors preventing him from joining the Communist Party was his inability, "although he had tried hard enough," to quite bring himself to believe that Utopia could be created in this world. "For he could not share the liberals' and the Communists' neo-Pelagian view of the nature of man and the 'belief that the human nature one saw in action in the past and today was solely the result of the *system*'" (p. 117).

Nevertheless in June 1939, when he left Wisconsin on a Guggenheim fellowship for study in New York, Alonzo still accepted, on the whole, John Dewey's system with its "complete account of morality, religion, and later, art" (p. 90). And he found it possible to blend the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle of the early thirties, in those aspects not too narrow for the moralist and the artist in him, with what he found in *Experience and Nature*. The broader view of experience in Dewey, who had brought into instrumentalism from his Idealist days the notion of the mind's activity as constitutive of knowledge, also made, he felt, for an ethic that was not "morally shabby." But

Alonzo was forced to go further in an approach to ethics that could be accused, of course, of subjectivism. With respect to utilitarianism on which he had been so well grounded in his early days by a man who had also won his respect as a real teacher, Alonzo nevertheless allows full play to what I have called a "visceral" response, even to the extent of endangering the credibility of his claim to prior "objective" grounds for rejecting the ethical theory.

"To assume that one's response to a philosophical theory, *particularly a moral theory*, is based only on rational grounds, is to believe that the sole connection between one's mind and one's body is biological, and that the rest of one's psyche is hermetically sealed off from one's reason." Though the objective grounds I have adduced are sufficient to make it wholly inadmissible, Alonzo confesses he feels toward utilitarianism as a theory of morals as "toward something physically nauseating." He doubts whether a "coherent utilitarian" could be found, but if he were "I would feel toward him as I would toward a Nazi . . . posted to Auschwitz or Dachau . . . toward a rat swimming in an open cloaca . . ." (p. 55).

One suspects a repugnance of almost equal strength for pragmatism as a *philosophy* offering genuine knowledge; though paradoxically, as we shall see, he is forced to make great use of a pragmatism of "opinions" in the "Platonic" sense for the sake of polemical thought and action. For Alonzo the truth cognized must in some sense be not the product of mere man but must "subsist" *out there*. And though on his neo-Kantian side he believes the mind is "constitutive" of its world, which in this sense is "symbol," he insists that in ethics and, indeed in the "rapt apprehension" of aesthetics, the mind and object must be one. In *The Moral Life and the Ethical Life* (1950), his philosophical turning point, he rejected an ethics based upon human desire, even a dominant desire controlling and organizing mere appetite. Either the values we perceive are "ontic," or we have a "bourgeois ethic" and the Nietzschean calculus of shopkeepers cushioning off impulses toward heroism, sacrifice, nobility and the dignity of tragic suffering. Furthermore, since a naturalistic ethic has no answer for the man who says he has no interest in the welfare of his fellows, the reformist naturalistic ethic is forced tacitly to accept the proposition that "Might makes right."

Some readers, whom a Baudelaire might address as "brother hypocrites," finding the proposition hard to take, will certainly find an alternative to the argument in objection to its tone. And, indeed, this intellectual novel dramatized in dialogue, like anything resembling a work of art, has its dominant and sub-dominant tones. At one extreme, we have the tone suggested by one of the titles Alonzo proposed for the "quasi-biography:" *It All Came to Nothing*. Rabelais, one of his favorite authors, is master of this tone: irreverent, farcical, sometimes scatological, occasionally outrageous. It is a mad world: "liberals" who are illiberal, goose-stepping exponents of freedom (when the time comes,

of course, in the sweet bye-and-bye), professors of philosophy piously dedicated to "truth," "scientific method," "empiricism" and, of course, the inevitable "change" for which all students must be prepared; all this and more: the attempt to corner the market for their "standard" brand.

In all his writing, Eliseo Vivas has brought philosophical style down to earth, giving Sancho Panza a chance to speak in more than proverbs. But now and then, in this book, it seems as though Maxie Waxie's student assistants have taken over when the boss has just stepped out—to say nothing of the absence of members of the "Klotz's family, a group of accomplished derriere kissers;" and members of King John Dewey's family "catch it," too, when Alonzo is in verve. Alonzo seems to have made a kind of shibboleth of the question: "What have you had to say in your writings about the facts of tragedy and death?" He seems to have found not only the King deficient, but, confronting two of his "Eminences" with the same question, discovered, no doubt to his gratification, that "when asked critical questions beyond science and Philistine moral problems, they were caught with their breeches down" (p. 148).

I will have to by-pass other examples of Alonzo's choice, bland irony; but I would not have the reader ignore this: if the spirit is outraged by the absurd in human beings and also by the absurd in things and nature and, nevertheless, can relieve itself in a number of tones of laughter, then, in this polemical and tragic book, catharsis, in the best sense, is also at work in *Two Roads to Ignorance*. Let me exhibit this in a long quotation, which will also help us to get on with the narrative and the argument.

In a dynamic society such as ours, intelligence is indispensable in order to avoid failure in any sense; but such qualities as goodwill, amiability, decency, charity, honesty, reliability, loyalty, the capacity to sympathize with the pain and frustration of others—these and other virtues must interrelate with knowledge, or reasoning, to bring about a life we call moral. . . . These virtues are not only sometimes more important than knowledge, but they are at least as essential for the conduct of the moral life as knowledge. To the virtues mentioned Alonzo would add a virtue to which he gave pride of place, a virtue that is not in abundance in our society: integrity. Without a resolute integrity, Alonzo was convinced, men became either victims of their own ambition or, and not against their wishes, the tools of those driven by the lust for power. In whatever sphere of life men find themselves, they will also find other men to enslave, whether materially or spiritually. The slave demands our pity; the enslaver our contempt.

Alonzo was confident that he had sketched an abstract picture of the good life. But he did not forget that life is often uncertain,

hard, cruel and unmitigatedly ugly and painful. He had known a number of people who had committed suicide. We are often the victims of sheer arbitrary cruelty and arrogance. We are also the victims of natural conditions over which we have no control. More often than not the cruelty and arrogance of which we are victims are unconscious, and exact as high a price of the victimizer as they do of the victim. But not infrequently are they the expression of self-conscious malice. When men's treachery and hypocrisy and beastly malice—which we ourselves are usually as often guilty as others—sting us, then the eyes go blind, the throat pulls, and the empty choke inside the chest beats up a chaos of hatred and pain. It is then that our resources of reason and courage are strained, and it is then that we need remember that without integrity and self-respect one cannot live the freeman's life.

The darkness, however, does not drag on forever; even in the midst of a long, drawn-out catastrophe the body reasserts itself and the mind gains a measure of equanimity. For no reason and from nowhere a liquid stream of joy runs in and floods us, lifting the anguish. The darkness breaks; is forgotten, and the day comes when life seems intensely worth living. All the more so if by understanding the source of evil we see the possibility of turning our impotent hatred into the creative task of eradicating its cause. This is what the good life is, a life that on cool reflection is judged to be worth living. (pp. 103-104)

I have neither the space nor the competence to deal with the philosophical arguments adduced in this intellectual history to support the narrative of a radical change in point of view. One thing seems clear about Eliseo Vivas's thought. An Unamuno American style, be it in Madison or New York or the places in between, he is always in the arena of ideas. And this not only because his thinking is closely integrated to the act of living but also because he wishes to keep his thinking and the arena of ideas from being impaled on one or the other horn of a quasi-Platonic Realism or a neo-Kantian Idealism. A William Marshall Urban, for instance, would press the same question he asked Ernst Cassirer, one of the thinkers from whom Alonzo confesses he borrowed: Is there, or is there not an "intelligible world" and in aesthetics does the symbol give "knowledge" so that a poet might be said, in making truth-claims in his poetry, to have a "philosophy"?

Alonzo bridles up at the very idea, not only as regards aesthetics but also philosophy. I think it is with a certain *pun d'onor*. He prefers to insist on

"ignorance," rather than to seek compromise in reconciling the two extremes of a reality creative enough for gratitude and awe, and "flawed" enough to justify blasphemy. Philosophy for him in the strict sense must be "systemic" and give genuine knowledge of "first and last things," by which I take it he means an indubitable knowledge, which some religions reserve for "revelation," of man's origins and his destiny. He does not say in so many words that philosophy as "systemic" cannot do this; but the condition is that philosophic systems must agree. We may therefore postpone the happy event indefinitely. Yet philosophical ideas, if not linked in any long chain of logical implications can be serious things, and in this sense of "philosophy" Alonzo would be the last to renounce it.

What precise model of philosophical knowledge does Alonzo set up? If it is there it escapes me. For what is to prove that even a hypothetical agreement of philosophical systems would be more than a game? As I search for the precise criteria of a genuine knowledge of "first and last things," I discover traces of the Vienna Circle of positivists; also a deep respect of the "solid" knowledge of the "hard sciences," the only source of "progress" in our times. But to try to work by their methodology toward a unified science encompassing ethics or art would for Alonzo be arrant "scientism," that is, naturalism at its worst producing the "thin" man for our Western culture.

I am driven like Sancho Panza, perhaps a little comically, to bring this Dulcinea down to earth. And I, for one, like Sancho, would be satisfied with bread baked from ordinary flour. Putting "knowledge" and to "know" in quotes, begging Alonzo's permission to beg the question—just for the fun of it—I will set down a number of things which I think Alonzo "knows." At least he talks and acts as if he "knew" them; and he seems rather hard on other people and groups of people who, for all their human weakness, he really expects to "know" better or to have "known" better.

Thus of naturalism Alonzo seems to "know" that Naturalism provides an inadequate basis for moral theory, it lacks a cosmogony, as also a theory of the origin of culture; it is itself *a prioristic*, not empirical; it has no sense of mystery, is incapable of religious response; finally, for the naturalist, "person" is just a psychological term.

Again, if the problem of moral philosophy is to face the fundamental task of showing, in general terms, "how radical conflicts and perplexities could be resolved morally, naturalism with its value-free picture of the world could not do it" (p. 242). The effective alternative, he "knows," presented in the moral experience of humanity through many generations, is the recognition of "ontic" values, with their quality of "requiredness," and their demand for our "espousal." Without such "knowledge," how could "liberal" and "conservative," terms used in his polemics, be more for Alonzo than "value-free" terms, requiring nothing of anybody?

To be sure Alonzo grants that certain species and varieties of "liberals," however strange, are bound to slip through his net. For Alonzo a "liberal," as he uses the term, is a "naturalist" or a fellow-traveler, sometimes unwittingly, of philosophical naturalism, applying its "methodology" or rather its "faith" to moral, educational, social, and especially to political problems. The reader should observe, however, that if for the young Alonzo "conservatives" had been plain "thugs," for Eliseo Vivas three or four types of "conservatives" who wield great power in finance and government still remain in that category. Alonzo has a chapter on "Politics or Idiocy" and it is plain that the choice is between taking some part in politics or becoming an "idiot" (in the Greek sense). Yet he entertains no illusions about "knowledge" in this area: "Political man was an activist who denied the truth of the opposition and thus tended to deprive himself of a full understanding of social and political problems." He found no "formal difference" between the goals of liberals and socialists and his own: "Both wanted to remove anything that deprived men of a decent life; both wanted a world in which there were no obstructions to human fulfillment that could be removed" (p. 263). But because of differences in what I can only call Alonzo's "philosophy" of man and also of "nature," which I trust I have described fully enough, he feels he must call himself a "man of the Right." But this means practically only "slowing up some of the change that was taking place"; what was still possible "to a large extent and ought to be sped-up and enlarged was the recognition of the supreme value of the person" (p. 260). And he "could not quite accept von Mises and Milton Friedman's idea—if that is what they believed—that all contemporary society required was a free market and minimum regulation" (p. 259). One must not hide Alonzo's belief that the "conservatives" he had encountered were on the whole morally better than the "liberals." But no doubt he was on the watch among his liberal friends and acquaintances for those traits in their human nature that promised well for their ambitious plans to reconstruct man and society. Fair enough!

Certainly Alonzo's political and social views are in the minor key, and that, I believe, is because he "knows" the tragic as a component of the very nature of things. *El sentimiento trágico de la vida* is no "component added by the poet to his dream to increase its texture." After Franco's invasion of the Spanish Republic, he could no longer fail to realize that the source of certain human catastrophes "is somehow to be traced beyond man, to the universe itself." The tragic vision "leads you to *see truly* (italics ours) an aspect of the experience of man in the universe itself." "Original sin, whether interpreted literally or mythically," pointed toward what naturalism had to deny categorically: that catastrophic evil has "its source not only in the social arrangements of men but beyond, in an *aporia* that is somehow lodged in the heart of the cosmos" (p. 145).

I insist that Alonzo “knows” tragedy; that he grasps what amounts for him to the *fact* of it in a *King Lear*, an *Oedipus Rex*, an *Antigone*. Some years ago I asked whether his assertion that if Leibniz had correctly read tragedy his *Theodicée* would have died still-born, does not make of aesthetic *perception*, as he says, *in and through* a work of art, no matter how the “substance” of thought and experience is “informed” or transformed or transmuted the source of “knowledge,” at least in the sense that it can, indeed should, stop the rolling of a philosophical theory in its tracks? Alonzo has not changed his view of the “Leibnizian syndrome” in this volume; but I begin to understand that if one reduces true “philosophical” knowledge to the “systemic,” and will declare such knowledge achieved only when “systems” can be made to agree, then of course Eliseo Vivas is right. Poetry cannot give philosophic knowledge and the poet as such cannot be a philosopher. But now, alas, the question arises for me, can poetry sometimes succeed in giving what I have been calling “knowledge” in quotation marks, and which (with the “verbal intransigency” by which he once characterized one of his critics) he insists, as is his right, on rejecting as “genuine,” that is, a “truly philosophic knowledge”? Vivas’s aesthetic in its claims lodges at the very heart of his theory of cognition; the *Two Roads* serves that aesthetic by illuminating and pin-pointing the problem.

Finally Alonzo, I hold, has “knowledge” “of the impenetrable and creative mystery that lies outside and within us,” wherein surge “currents of creative energy over which we have no control” and which he is willing to call “God;” since a certain anthropomorphism is inevitable, and even consider Him “personal,” in order to honor the creative surge with the “highest term” in his vocabulary. He adds, “If not devoid of imagination,” or “brain-washed by scientism, you must acknowledge that creativity elicits a complex response made up of gratitude or piety, of fear and reverence, of awe and self-abasement at your finitude and impotence,” as also on occasion, when you are visited by catastrophe or by iniquity, anger, hatred, blasphemy, despair, anguish, depending on the circumstance.

In these utterances lodges a whole nest of problems I will only point to cursorily. Is “creative,” as used, a “commendatory” term, which I believe is normal usage? Is the “flaw” in things also “creative”? Alonzo is no Manichaeon, but I have heard in India of Śiva, creator and destroyer. But of interest at present is not this variety of religious experience but the claim that “creative” moments are “closed to knowledge, for they throw no light on first and last questions” (p. 203). In one sense this is a truism, in another sense puzzling. For don’t you “know” or shouldn’t you “know” that a moment is “creative” if you are willing to identify it as such?

But Alonzo by this time has become impatient. For he has stated that what I urge as “knowledge,” he much more diffidently calls “opinions,” though in a “Platonic” sense. I will stop only to inquire whether one who rejects a

Platonic "realism," as Alonzo does with regret, really has the right to an opinion in the Platonic sense? But Alonzo is rich in resource to plunge us into "mystery," which he does not use in a religious sense. "All thinking, whether commonsensical, philosophic, or scientific—the latter at the beginning of a science—starts from a world of which the thinker is in conscious possession and *which he can examine, but which he can't altogether abandon.*" (Italics mine.) For the initial picture from which thought starts is an aesthetic construction in the two senses of the term. There is the primitive sense: "a picture that results from an act of esthesis, a production of . . . a perception that is not passive but constitutive; and the current sense, the product of the employment of the arts as categorical means of perception." For art creates our "picture, such as it is" "of what the world is like" (p. 274).

But Alonzo has forged a sword that can cut both ways. For this world given to the thinker and which "he can examine, but which he can't altogether abandon" can cut the nerve even of Alonzo's opinions, which it must be admitted he expresses with considerable force and on whose validity he makes even the future of Western civilization depend. Who can deny the sincerity of the young Alonzo's self-accusation for that confident propaganda à la Maxie Waxie, making in ignorant young minds he meant to reconstruct the kind of void eventually to be filled by the faith of Communism? And he is willing to take his full share of the blame for the fall of France, thanks to the undermining of morals and morale in which he participated, though of course such propaganda was only one factor in that *débacle*. But how does he know that he had power to examine and alter his initial presentation to an extent that made him culpable in case of failure. "Starting points cannot in themselves be objects of knowledge." One can only supplant one picture by another, as Dewey supplanted idealism by instrumentalism, and Alonzo supplanted several positions before he reached his present "opinion." Of course, in a "very limited way, one can discover inadequacies and lacunae, such as the indifference of Dewey to tragedy and heroism, which was one of the first reasons that led me to abandon naturalism." And Alonzo, whom I would call "the man of response" does not hesitate to apply the sword-edge to his own throat: "The so-called knowledge based on one presentation is an *inexcusable* (italics mine) and egregious illusion" (p. 275). To be sure he still insists that, though bereft of the "cognitive value" he once thought they had, as against naturalism he considers his views on ethics, the nature of the person, the nature of art and the part it plays in human life, and even his social and political views "valid," though demoting his views on art to the merest opinion.

Yes, Alonzo admits, he has landed in a "mess, very messy mess" (p. 280). Yet, perhaps because of a primary presentation of the reviewer that has resisted all examination, Alonzo seems at one point to glimpse a way out. Doesn't he know this much, however suspicious of highly debatable speculations both

theological and metaphysical: "What Alonzo took to be primary was that the religious response was to the creative mystery that surrounds us. To address it as God and call him King or Lord or Person, diffidently, with an awareness that the expression, in sentences that claimed to be propositions, were more like a cry, a dirge and a song, than a judgment—surely there could be no error in such a response. *If error were to be found, the notion of truth and error would have to be liberalized*" (Italics ours, p. 285).

Personally, I can only regret that owing to the intellectual and social ambience in which he had to find his way, Eliseo Vivas could not have investigated the possibilities of discovering and elucidating that more liberal notion of truth and error. Perhaps he could have worked more positively with aesthetic perception, not to prove, God forbid! that it was "philosophy" but to use it as a wedge to open up some fresh air space for philosophy itself. A representative man bears the stigmata of his generation; not a few will recognize themselves and their predicament in Alonso Quijano, and it will add not to their "ignorance," which Alonzo himself did not like in his title, but to a vital knowledge.