

JOSEPH PEARCE AND G K CHESTERTON

'Wisdom is a reflection of the eternal light, untarnished mirror of God's active power, image of his goodness. Although alone she can do all things ; herself unchanging, she makes all things new. In each generation she passes into holy souls, makes them friends of God and prophets.'

Wisdom 7 : 26-27

Joseph Pearce, former member of a white supremacist organization demanding the forced removal of all non-whites from the United Kingdom, the National Front, has just published the story of his conversion from hatred to love, from insanity to sanity and the religion God established on earth.¹ Gilbert Keith Chesterton played no little part in that conversion.

"The moment men cease to pull against the Catholic Church they feel a tug toward it. The moment they cease to shout it down they begin to listen to it with pleasure. The moment they try to be fair to it they begin to be fond of it. But when that affection has passed a certain point it begins to take on the tragic and menacing grandeur of a great love affair."²

"We that are Christians believe that the family has a divine sanction. But any reasonable pagan, if he will work it out, will discover that the family existed before the State and has prior rights; that the State exists only as a collection of families, and that its sole function is to safeguard the rights of each and all of them."³

Of all writers, Chesterton is the most difficult to categorise. One tries in vain to source a quote. He will write on one topic, *A Tale of Two Cities*, for instance, and begin with an illustration that is about as far from London and Paris as Tasmania's Freycinet Peninsula, or as removed from Dickens' tale of love and self-sacrifice as the private life of the Devil. He seems bent on obscuring the integrity and continuity of the various strands of his thought. Nor do the titles of his essays give clue to content whether the essential or the (often more valuable) accidental as the following collection may serve to illustrate :

The Curious Englishman
The Grave-Digger
The Orthodoxy of Hamlet
The Heroic that Happened
On Keeping a Dog
The Love of Lead
Good Stories Spoilt by Great Authors

Read any of his essays and you encounter another problem. There is no obvious path to chase what seemed, when you stumbled over it, a most profound thought which led you, willy-nilly, to another, and another, and another. You promise yourself at the end of the essay to return to the sentence that impressed you, and do

¹ *Race with the Devil ; My Journey from Racial Hatred to Rational Love*, Charlotte, North Carolina (St Benedict Press), 2013

² *The Road to Damascus*, John A. O'Brien (ed.), Vol. I, London, 1949, p. 271, quoted in Joseph Pearce, *Wisdom and Innocence, A Life of G K Chesterton*, San Francisco (Ignatius Press), 1996, Preface.

³ G K Chesterton in *G. K.'s Weekly*, Jan. 3, 1935, quoted in *Race with the Devil* op. cit. Ch. 15, footnote 7.

you think you can find it ? Or even the faintest indication of where it is hidden ? The only way to read Chesterton is with pencil and notebook to hand, forcing yourself to pause at the end of each sentence or, if defacing a book does not trouble you, by using a highlighter.⁴

There is a thought of Chesterton's on sleep. The writer read it some forty years or so ago and has tried in vain to find it ever since. It refers to the truth that when I wake in the morning I have no idea where I have been for the last seven or so hours, or in whose keeping I have been (certainly not in my own), or why I should have been immersed so profoundly in obscure adventures in another land. Sleep is surely proof of man's utter dependence on something, or someone, other than himself.

Here is a related thought :

"The Supreme adventure is being born. There we... walk suddenly into a splendid and startling trap. There we... see something of which we have not dreamed before. Our father and mother... lie in wait for us and leap out on us, like brigands from the bush. Our uncle is a surprise... When we step into the family, by the act of being born, we... step into a world which is incalculable, into a world which has its own strange laws, into a world which could do without us, into a world that we have not made. In other words, when we step into the family we step into a fairy tale..."⁵

Precisely ! The world did not need us ; yet here, through some miracle, we are. And, somehow, we existed *previously* to our appearance on earth, a reality the theologians explain through our existence (from all eternity) in the mind of God.

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How could one foresee the discovery of a paragraph such as the following in Chesterton's essay with the title *Pickwick Papers* ?

"[T]here is one passage at least upon which [modern biblical critics] have never pounced, at least to my knowledge ; and in pointing it out to them I feel that I am, or ought to be, providing material for quite a multitude of Hyde Park orations. I mean that singular arrangement in the mystical account of the Creation by which light is created first and all the luminous bodies afterwards."

The more frequent visitors to this website will be familiar with the view of its author about the first sentence in *Genesis*, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...", namely, that before He created the earth the Almighty first created a material setting, the heavens (or heaven as the Latin Vulgate has it), which must necessarily have pre-existed all of common or ordinary matter *because there had first to be a place in which he could create it*. Chesterton continues—

"One could not imagine a process more open to the elephantine logic of the Bible-smasher than this : that the sun should be created after the sunlight. The conception that lies at the back of the phrase is indeed profoundly antagonistic to much of the modern point of view. To many modern people it would sound like saying that foliage existed before the first leaf... like saying that childhood existed before a baby

⁴ There is a 'modern' way to cope and that is to take the book in electronic form with a facility in the collection program that allows you to highlight as you read.

⁵ *Heretics*, London, 1905 ; reprinted in 1951, The Bodley Head, p. 191. He repeated the thought a year or two later in *Orthodoxy* (London, 1908, p. 82) : "The test of all happiness is gratitude; and I felt grateful though I hardly knew to whom. . . We thank people for birthday presents of cigars and slippers. Can I thank no one for the birthday present of birth ?"

was born. The idea is, as I have said, alien to most modern thought, and like many other ideas which are alien to most modern thought, it is a very subtle and a very sound idea. Whatever be the meaning of the passage in the actual primeval poem, there is a very real metaphysical meaning in the idea that light existed before the sun and stars. It is not barbaric ; it is rather Platonic. The idea existed before any of the machinery which made manifest the idea. Justice existed when there was no need of judges, and mercy existed before any man was oppressed...”

Here, most satisfying to the man of common sense, is a grasp of the metaphysical utterly foreign to the materialist and atheist, to the modern scientist (not because of his science but because his science is strangled by materialism and subjectivism) ; foreign to anyone who will not trouble to study the Doctrine of Causality. Here is the sense of the eternal ideas premised on the truth that a form must first exist in mind before it can appear in the real. That which is the foundation of all human making founded, long before man came into existence, the natural order.

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The atheist is blind. He receives daily the gift of life, the nature he enjoys so freely—not only the air he breathes but the very facility to breathe it—but he refuses to acknowledge a giver. He did not *bring himself* into existence ; he does not *keep himself* in existence : content with the proximate and ephemeral, he never troubles himself with the ultimate. In what he is pleased to call his mind, he thinks reality is nothing but matter randomly organised ; no design in his body or soul, no ends in nature ; no ends save those he contrives in *his* making. The Jumbo jet is ‘a miracle’⁶ of human making, the wind-hovering falcon, which does naturally and within a week of fledging what it takes 30,000 man-years of effort to achieve, is nothing but the result of a series of happy accidents. God save us from such lapidary, folly ! The pagan Aristotle was light years ahead of the modern materialist.

Once the thinker grasps the truth that every being, whether material or immaterial, has an end—a *final* cause, something intended—he must acknowledge that *someone* (it cannot be *something*) has done the intending, has established the end. Having crossed that threshold, since *how something operates* is determined by its end, he reaches (albeit confusedly) an understanding of the indelible character of form. Form follows *end* (not *function*, as architect Louis Sullivan liked to assert). Insofar as the end is fixed, so is the form of what acts for that end. Here is the reason dogs produce nothing but dogs, cats nothing but cats, whales nothing but whales. It is the indelible *form* they pass on, not the ever-fluctuating matter in which the individual is found. Here is the reason Darwin’s macro-evolutionary thesis is utter nonsense.

Once the thinker takes this step, suddenly, life has meaning. It was for his assistance in taking the step that Joseph Pearce has given thanks to G K Chesterton.⁷

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⁶ Thus, the fool Richard Dawkins.

⁷ Cf. Joseph Pearce, *Wisdom and Innocence, A Life of G K Chesterton*, San Francisco (Ignatius Press), 1996