

## ABSTRACT

Chesterton and His Interlocutors: Dialogical Style and Ethical Debate on Eugenics

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Before Nazi Germany's eugenic practices had been completely exposed and denounced, G. K. Chesterton, a British writer best known for his fiction and Roman Catholic apologetics, published *Eugenics and Other Evils* in 1922. Therein he fiercely opposed eugenics and state sponsored eugenic practices; but his was not an isolated text offered in monologic argument to some vague social menace. In fact, Chesterton never wrote monologically but always in an intrinsically dialogical manner. As this dissertation attempts to demonstrate, this dialogical style, epitomized in the eugenics debate, energized Chesterton's fiction, most notably his novel *The Man Who Was Thursday* and serves as a way of reading all of Chesterton, his fiction and non-fiction alike.

This dissertation will attempt to demonstrate the historical and dialogical context of that conflict, explicate the exact arguments of both Inge and Chesterton, provide commentary on the dialogical style inherent in Chesterton's literary works specifically *The Man Who Was Thursday*, *The Ball and the Cross*, and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, and *Manalive* and demonstrate both the prophetic nature and the literary excellence of Chesterton's dialogical discourse.

The importance of this dissertation is, at least, three-fold: first, to recover the historical context of Chesterton's writings concerning eugenics, particularly his *Eugenics and Other Evils*, by returning him to conversation with his sparring partner on the subject, Dean Inge; secondly, to explicate Chesterton's argument against eugenics by showing its relationship to Chesterton's other writing, more particularly to those texts which are intrinsically dialogical. Nothing to date has been written concerning Chesterton's dialogical style, and only a handful of articles attempt to explicate Chesterton's position against eugenics. It is my hope that the explication of Chesterton's dialogical style will serve as a new way of reading all of Chesterton's works. The dissertation is important furthermore because it will attempt to uncover an important theological development in Christian ethical practice, even as it will also offer an example about how such monumentally important moral questions might be engaged dialogically rather than polemically and thus monologically. Obviously the work of the Russian literary philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin will figure prominently in this effort.

Chesterton and His Interlocutors: Dialogical Style and Ethical Debate on Eugenics

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of English

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## DEDICATION

for Donald and Gladiola Shipley  
and Christine Marie, Cole Morgan, Corban Mace,  
Campbell Mattie, and Corinne Marie

## CHAPTER ONE

### “Evil Always Wins Through the Strength of Its Splendid Dupes”: An Introduction to Chesterton’s Dialogical Style and the Eugenics Debate

#### *Introduction*

It is ironic that both Harry Bruinius and Christine Rosen place G. K. Chesterton among the most noted and notable antagonists of eugenics and eugenics-based legislation in Britain during the first third of the twentieth century, yet there exists no systematic explication or analysis of Chesterton’s collection of essays on the subject, *Eugenics and Other Evils*.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, Chesterton’s biographers all but ignore this aspect of Chesterton’s political, theological, and literary involvement. Even such important texts as *Chesterton on Evil* by Mark Knight and *The Size of Chesterton’s Catholicism* by David Fagerberg make no mention of Chesterton’s interest in eugenics. Lawrence Clipper’s and Margaret Canovan’s biographies are the exception but still pay only scant attention to the subject. Stanley Jaki’s *Chesterton A Seer of Science* makes important strides explicating Chesterton’s overall interest in scientific matters but treats eugenics only in a minor fashion. The only article that is devoted to *Eugenics and Other Evils* lies hidden in the Library of Congress.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, even less attention has been given to the debate between Chesterton and the Very Reverend William Ralph Inge, Dean of St. Paul’s of London, concerning eugenics.

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<sup>1</sup>Both Harry Bruinius’s *Better for All the World* and Christine Rosen’s *Preaching Eugenics* have been employed extensively in chapters one and six of this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup>The article pertains more to chapter six of this dissertation, so I will discuss it there.

However, despite the lack of current critical interest in the subject, Dean Inge himself recognized Chesterton as his true sparring partner on the subject. On several occasions, the Dean epitomized Chesterton as the opponent of eugenics, usually scoffingly. Inge considered Chesterton an “irrationalist prophet” and considered his position essentially anti-Christian (Rich 8). In his *Outspoken Essays*, the Dean writes, “The prejudices against eugenics are still strong. They find vent in such strange ebullitions as a recent book by G. K. Chesterton, and in frequent denunciations on the part of Roman Catholics. It is, however, strange that Christians should be anti-eugenists” (Second Series 273). As will be demonstrated, the Dean of St. Paul’s viewed the alleged new science as inherently Christian, while Chesterton viewed it as essentially anti-Christian.

Though the references of Chesterton by Inge are numerically small, by contrast Chesterton frequently cites Dean Inge as his antagonist in the eugenics controversy. He confesses that he spent much of his time “leading a riotous life, scrapping with Mr. Shaw about Socialism, or Dean Inge about Science” (“Sloppiness” 268). In other words, Chesterton is not accidentally engaged in a vague and abstruse dialogue about social matters of his day, but is actively and knowingly engaged with the Dean of St. Paul’s on this most important subject of eugenics. Furthermore, as Christine Rosen effectively demonstrates in her 2004 publication, *Preaching Eugenics*, the promotion of eugenics was considered the only enlightened position for Christians and secularists alike to take at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She begins by drawing the relationship between the Social Gospel movement in America and eugenics.

The theology of the Social Gospel encouraged social action, and in the last decades of the nineteenth century, many Protestant ministers like [the Rev. Charles] Sheldon [best known for writing *In His Steps*] pursued it in campaigns to eliminate prostitution, raise the legal age of consent for sexual relations, and otherwise eradicate vice in cities that had become, in their eyes, modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. Purity reform in particular drew on the Social Gospel and embraced an ideal of perfectibility that meshed well with social Christianity. Through local societies, national Purity Congresses, and the American Purity Alliance, reformers in the post-Civil War era promoted goals of “race regeneration” that presaged the rhetoric of the eugenics movement. Developing apace with this interest in purifying society was a move in the field of philanthropy toward hereditary explanations for social problems. Influenced by the emerging currents of thought on heredity, including Lombroso’s theories of criminal degeneracy, charity and corrections workers confronted Herbert Spencer’s claim that their work thwarted natural selection by stopping “that natural process of elimination by which society continually purifies itself.” Organization such as the National Conference of Charities and Correction began to explore ways to *prevent* the spread of degeneracy by focusing on heredity as a probable cause and identifying those segments of the populations most burdened by the scourge. As one contemporary observer noted, charity and philanthropic workers “had become persuaded that for the good of society and the rescue of unborn posterity such blighted lines of descent should be cut off. (26)

Though Rosen is chiefly concerned to demonstrate the relationship between religion and eugenics in America, the same tawdry relationship was burgeoning across the Atlantic in England and on the Continent; and it was against these same moral and religious currents that Gilbert Keith Chesterton swam. Yet Chesterton’s dialogue with Inge has been virtually ignored. Thus it is important to reframe the text of *Eugenics and Other Evils* within the context of the original dialogue.

Before Nazi Germany’s eugenic practices had been completely exposed and denounced, G. K. Chesterton, best known for his fiction and Roman Catholic apologetics, published *Eugenics and Other Evils* in 1922. Therein he fiercely

opposed eugenics in general and state sponsored eugenic practices in particular; but his was not an isolated text offered in monologic argument to some vague social menace. In fact, Chesterton never wrote monologically but always in an intrinsically dialogical manner. Though his apologetics have traditionally been read as a rugged, blunt instrument containing several absolute claims and statements, his apologetics are ultimately dialogical. However counterintuitive this may seem, Chesterton's method is actually quite often the opposite of absolutist claims—his apologetics are permeated by a kind of dialogical openness susceptible of illumination using the work of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin. In order to demonstrate this dialogical style, we will focus on M. M. Bakhtin's understanding of the dialogical imagination with particular reference to the novelistic form. I will not suggest that Chesterton is Bakhtinian in his employment of dialogical style, particularly with reference to Bakhtin's preference for open-endedness, but will rather employ Bakhtin's theory as a way of reading G. K. Chesterton. As this dissertation will attempt to demonstrate, this dialogical style, epitomized in the eugenics debate, energized Chesterton's fiction, most notably his novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and serves as a way of reading all of Chesterton, his fiction and non-fiction alike.

The first chapter will explore Chesterton's use of interlocutors from his earliest days, leading up to his interaction about Eugenics with the Dean Inge. Also, the first chapter will explain the literary theory of M. M. Bakhtin as it relates to a dialogical style. The second chapter will explicate not only Inge's role in the Eugenics debate but also his position and the theological underpinnings of that position. The third chapter will analyze Chesterton's *Eugenics and Other Evils*,

paying particular attention to Chesterton's attention to the so-called feeble-minded and the theological basis for his position. The fourth chapter will attempt to explain the stylistic connection between the Eugenics debate and Chesterton's fiction, arguing that Chesterton's imaginative works possess a dialogical style, understood by reading Chesterton through the lens of Bakhtin, not arguing that Chesterton is Bakhtinian. Chapter Five will attempt to apply this same theory to Chesterton's literary and cultural criticism, showing how Chesterton dialogically interacts with various figures of the Great Tradition of Western Literature. The final chapter of the dissertation will evaluate Chesterton's role in the Eugenics debate and his dialogical style, while at the same time attempting to reveal the prophetic nature of Chesterton's writings on Eugenics as well as the importance of his dialogical style for current literary scholarship.

### *Chesterton's Early Interlocutors*

In his 24 February 1923 installment of the *Illustrated London News*, Chesterton declared, "When I began to write, my antagonist was Mr. Robert Blatchford; then it was Mr. Bernard Shaw; of later years it has generally been the Dean of St. Paul's" (48). To the latter interlocutor we shall return in chapter two, but as we shall see Chesterton's use of interlocutors to develop his own thinking began long before he knew Robert Blatchford—indeed, long before Chesterton began to write. Combining her words with his own, Maisie Ward suggests that such development follows that of his ancestry: "Marie's father [G. K.'s maternal grandfather], whom Gilbert never saw, had been 'one of the old Wesleyan lay-

preachers and was thus involved in public controversy, a characteristic which has descended to his grandchild” (9-10).

While Gilbert was still a toddler, the Chesterton family suffered the profound loss of their first child, Beatrice. Concisely put, Chesterton lived the first three years of his life in the shadow of “the idol of the household” and spent the remaining two years before Cecil’s birth in the silence of Victorian mourning (Dale 7). “The emotional situation within the immediate family was,” Dale explains, “greatly complicated by Edward Chesterton’s behavior, for, in a travesty of grief, he turned his daughter’s picture to the wall, got rid of all her possessions, and refused to allow Gilbert or his wife to mention Beatrice’s name again” (7). As GKC would later explain in his autobiography, “I had a little sister who died when I was a child. I have little to go on; for she was the only subject about which my father did not talk. It was the one dreadful sorrow of his abnormally happy and even merry existence; and it is strange to think that I never spoke to him about it to the day of his death” (42-43). So it was with welcome relief that, with the birth of his brother a couple of years after Beatrice’s death, Gilbert welcomed Cecil into the world by stating, “Now I shall always have an audience” (Ward 13). But as Maise Ward semi-accurately points out, the “prophecy remembered by all parties . . . proved singularly false. As soon as Cecil could speak, he began to argue and the brothers’ intercourse thenceforward consisted of unending discussion. They always argued, they never quarrelled [sic]” (13). The final sentence belies Ward’s own close relationship with the Chestertons and the lens through which she views her subject, but the former sentences are quite instructive though misleading. Ward contends that Chesterton’s prophecy proved utterly false because Cecil



developed opinions of his own, not always agreeing with his elder brother and in fact sometimes ardently disagreeing, even publicly upon occasion; but her ture contention does not disprove Chesterton's prophetic utterance. An audience must not necessarily be sympathetic in order to serve as an audience. As Ward puts it, "It is hard to imagine anything that could clarify better the ideas of a strong mind than finding itself in opposition. This opposition began at home, in argument with Cecil" (111). If anything, Gilbert's early interaction with his often disagreeing (and disagreeable) brother propelled Chesterton into what would become a dialogical style of writing. The brothers sometimes agreed; often they disagreed, but Gilbert unlike his younger brother learned early to listen to Cecil even when he did not much like what he had to say. Significantly for the present work, some of Chesterton's earliest surviving writing is a "dramatic journal" written in dialogue between Cecil and Gilbert (Ward 29).

However, this is only one side of the story: Gilbert was slow to learn to speak, and his parents feared the worse, eventually subjecting him to medical examination. The doctors told Mr. and Mrs. Chesterton that their boy was either an idiot or a genius. Though he interacted well with Cecil, he describes his early days as rather solitary. As Ward points out, "In these early days, he was (he says of himself) 'somewhat solitary,' but not unhappy, and perfectly good-humoured about the tricks which were inevitably played on a boy who always appeared to be half asleep. 'He sat at the back of the room,' says Mr. Fordham, 'and never distinguished himself. We thought him the most curious thing that ever was.' His schoolfellows noted how he would stride along, 'apparently muttering poetry, breaking into inane laughter.'"(25). The boy who would eventually compose one

essay while dictating yet another to his secretary was lost at school: “His early days at school were very solitary, his chief occupation being to draw all over his books. He drew caricatures of his masters, he drew scenes from Shakespeare, he drew prominent politicians. He did not at first make many friends” (Ward 23). But in addition to drawing, a skill he would later hone into an art, he recorded his personal thoughts in journals.

One particular journal coincides with the founding of the J.D.C.—the Junior Debating Club, a group of friends who played a significant role in the intellectual formation of GKC. Ward mentions that the J.D.C. was the one thing for which Chesterton consistently showed “solemnity” and “gravity,” a “gravity untouched by humour [sic]” (30-31). The Junior Debating Club was a group of some dozen or so young boys (Chesterton was about sixteen) that formed themselves into a club to discuss that greatest of English wordsmiths, Shakespeare, but soon took any subject for discussion and debate, as suggested by the name of the club.<sup>3</sup> Theirs was a serious gathering, eventually publishing their materials in a magazine entitled *The Debater*. They met weekly at various members’ homes for tea and the reading of a paper written by one of their own, followed by vigorous discussion concerning the essay in question. Among its members were Lucian Oldershaw, Gilbert’s eventual brother-in-law, and Edmund Clerihew Bentley, to whom Chesterton would dedicate *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

They were the Knights of the Round Table. They were Jongleurs de Dieu. They were the Human Club, through whom and in whom he

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<sup>3</sup>Finch informs us that the Junior Debating Club was formed as a “rival” to the Senior Debating Club at St. Paul’s (24).

had made the grand discovery of Man. They were his youth personified. The note is still struck in the letters of his engagement period, and it was only forty years later, writing his *Autobiography*, that he was able to picture with a certain humorous detachment this group of boys who met to eat buns and criticise [sic] the universe. (Ward 31)

As Ward aptly illustrates, the J.D.C. was for GKC “a symbol of the ideal friendship” (31).<sup>4</sup> Even after his matriculation to the University of London together with Bentley’s and Oldershaw’s matriculation to Oxford, when the group was forced to separate physically, Gilbert continued J.D.C. correspondence.<sup>5</sup> It was there at the University of London at the Slade School of Art, after a brief stint at St. John’s Wood, that Chesterton suffered a severe crisis.

### *The Slade School Crisis*

The Slade School Crisis, as it has come to be known, deserves some mention here if for no other reason than to discuss Alzina Stone Dale’s keen observation concerning Chesterton’s eventual emergence from the crisis. Blending Chesterton’s words with his own, Chesterton’s biographer Alzina Stone Dale writes of this period:

The early 1890’s were the height of a period that was aesthetically lush and decadent, with the kind of depression that resulted from “the sense that man’s two great inspirations had failed him . . . the Christian religion . . . and the republican enthusiasm.” As a result, the times “were like one long afternoon in a rich house on a rainy

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<sup>4</sup>Chesterton’s interaction with the members of the Junior Debating Club sharply contrasts his experience in early, formal education. Both Maise Ward and Chesterton himself describe his early years somewhat ironically as “solitary.” Particularly, due to health problems and lagging development, Chesterton did not succeed in the classroom—perhaps, he was simply bored by what would have been rote, monological teaching methods. See Maise Ward’s chapter entitled “School Days.”

<sup>5</sup>During this time, Chesterton was also introduced to the I.D.K. (I Don’t Know), another debating society of whom the Bloggs and Oldershaws were a part; but the I.D.K. had a much lesser significant effect on Chesterton than did the J.D.C. (Stone 52). Bently, Oldershaw, and Cecil were all active members of the I.D.K. (Ffinch 62).

day. . . . Everybody believed that anything happening was even duller than nothing happening.” (37-38)

The Decadents, as the artists of the *fin de siècle* were called, were led by Oscar Wilde, gloried in art for art's sake and exuded a pessimism that troubled the young Chesterton. As Jay Corrin notes, “The great spiritual sin of the age [a ‘belief in mechanical orderliness and materialistic plentitude, all insured by inevitable biological progress’] . . . led to limitless pessimism and prevented man from doing anything constructive about improving the condition of his worldly estate” (8). Chesterton found solace from this philosophy of nihilism neither in the melioristic optimism of the late Victorians nor in the pessimism of the Decadents. He internalized much of the cultural crisis; and his dual rejection, coupled with normal adolescent questioning, created for him a personal identity crisis of immense proportions.

What began as perhaps nothing more than the usual adolescent identity crisis became for Chesterton a defining moment. Dale writes that “the memory of it remained for him another of those sharp lines drawn across his life, making him acutely aware of ‘before’ and ‘after’” (30). Though it actually began before his matriculation to the Slade School of Art, his crisis melded with his interaction with the dominant philosophy of Impressionism, then in vogue at Slade. In his *Autobiography*, Chesterton describes both the prevailing philosophy of the day and the effect that it had upon him:

[I]t was a very negative and even nihilistic philosophy. And though I never accepted it altogether, it threw a shadow over my mind and made me feel that most profitable and worthy ideas were, as it were, on the defensive. [. . .] And this atmosphere also tended to contribute, however indirectly, to a certain mood of unreality and sterile isolation that settled at this time upon me; and I think upon

many others. [. . .] I was not mad in any medical or physical sense; I was simply carrying the scepticism [sic] of my time as far as it would go. And I soon found that it would go a great deal further than most of the sceptics [sic] went. While dull atheists came and explained to me that there was nothing but matter, I listened with a sort of calm horror of detachment, suspecting that there was nothing but mind. (86-88)

As John Coates effectively demonstrates in *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*, the crucial problem with Impressionism for Chesterton was that it stifled and limited the imagination to the individual's perspective. It was this narrowing of the imagination which Chesterton saw eventually ended in solipsism.

For Chesterton, this reconciliation of the prevailing nihilism with an affirmation of life's worth required more than mental acrobatics: this was an intensely internalized struggle. As Corrin points out, "The *fin de siècle* seemed so final that he envisioned it as the end of the world rather than the end of the century" (6).<sup>6</sup> And like many adolescents Chesterton contemplated suicide. Many of Chesterton's early poems on suicide take on significance, given the specific nature of Chesterton's crisis. In a poem entitled "A Ballad for Suicide" he writes:

The world will have another washing day;  
The decadents decay; the pedants pall;  
And H. G. Wells has found that children play,  
And Bernard Shaw discovered that they squall;  
Rationalists are growing rational—  
And through thick woods one finds a stream astray,

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<sup>6</sup>"Chesterton's attitude to Impressionism seems peculiarly quaint today, but he saw it at the time as an expression of skepticism. [. . .] It was, of course, the most radical art-form at the time Chesterton spent his few months at the Slade, a time when 'nobody dared to dream there could be such a thing as Post-Impressionism or Post-Post-Impressionism'. What shocked the nineteenth-century bourgeois consciences of France, and yet charms us so today, Chesterton attacked on philosophical grounds" (Ffinch 68).

So secret that the very sky seems small—  
I think I will not hang myself to-day. (*Chesterton Anthology* 350)<sup>7</sup>

To the Slade School crisis and to *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the novel in which Chesterton imaginatively worked out that crisis, we shall return. The important point to be made for our more immediate purpose is to note the role that dialogue, and more specifically, the Junior Debating Club played in the resolution of that life-altering crisis. It is no coincidence that Gilbert's separation from his friends in the J.D.C. coincided with his depression (Ffinch 33). As Michael Coren notes:

His sense of isolation began to grow again, a feeling which had entirely left him since the beginning of his friendship with Bentley and the others in the J.D.C. Unsure as to where his real talents lay, he knew he had a contribution to make to the world but had no idea where, or why. All he could realistically see about him was a break-up of contentment and joy. He hadn't questioned the life-style of debate, walks with good friends, comfortable argument and the warm safety of home and companions. He was confused, facing a painful experience without any weapons to fight back. (43)

Chesterton found himself alone in the labyrinth of the *fin de siècle*, without recourse to the life-giving dialogue he had known as a young lad. Dale writes that "As he spent his time arguing with other 'fledgling philosophers' around the University of London, as well as corresponding with the J. D. C., who were being exposed to the current *zeitgeist* at the universities, Gilbert began to grow more optimistic again. In debates he took 'the other side' [i.e. optimism] and found to his delight that there was a case for it" (38). In the J.D.C., GKC found his intellectual salvation. Through that social exchange, Chesterton began to work

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<sup>7</sup>Many are the speculations concerning this period. Ffinch notes additionally Chesterton's delayed entrance into puberty. Of course, he cites no medical reports but suggests that Chesterton's "pituitary gland was not functioning normally" (39). Hunter cites various other suggestions: "sexual sadism, Satanism, or homosexuality" (2).

out the philosophical dilemmas presented to him at Slade. Not in the isolation of his own mind, but rather in the context of argument and debate—dialogue. In that exchange of ideas intrinsic within the Junior Debating Club, Chesterton was able to develop his own philosophy of life, saving him from the despair of the *fin de siècle*.<sup>8</sup> As Coren points out, “Gilbert clung to friendships, aspired to them, all his life. It was as though they were spiritual and intellectual lifelines to him, providing an opportunity for stimulation and succour [sic] . . . . He could never quite believe in his own brilliance, but would frequently believe in the brilliance of others” (249). All of these important dialogical interactions influenced and formed Chesterton long before his formal dialogical interaction with his first official interlocutor, Robert Blatchford, ever began.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Blatchford, Shaw, and Inge*

In 1903 and 1904, Robert Blatchford, editor of the *Clarion*, a weekly London newspaper, wrote several essays in which he denied Christianity in favor of materialistic rationalism. Chesterton, along with several other prominent writers of the time, was asked to respond in series of essays that were published as *The Religious Doubts of Democracy*. “Chesterton was not alone in counter-attacking Blatchford’s rationalistic attack on faith, but he was the most outstanding figure and by far the most eloquent” (Ffinch 118). In his opening

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<sup>8</sup>The role that Frances Blogg, Chesterton’s wife (a devout Anglican who contrasted Chesterton’s early nominal Anglicanism), played in this “resurrection” cannot be underestimated; however, her role is most fully seen (ironically since Frances was reluctant to convert) in Chesterton’s eventual conversion to Catholicism; but we should not be surprised that as Ffinch notes “he met Frances Blogg at a debate held at her home” (50).

<sup>9</sup>The omission of Hilaire Belloc is intentional. The “two powerful and very different minds would reciprocally influence one another,” but the relationship constitutes more influence than dialogue (Ward 115).

comments, Chesterton lauded Blatchford for opening his paper to the opposition. “I ought not to do it [write his response] without first of all offering to Mr. Blatchford our gratitude, and something which is better than gratitude, our congratulations, upon the very magnanimous action which he has taken in thus putting this paper into the hands of the religious opponents. In doing so he has scored, in a generous unconsciousness, a real point” (*Blatchford* 373). In his first formal dialogue, Chesterton exhibits genuine interest in dialogue as a method in addition to the obvious importance of matters religious.

Interestingly enough it was this exchange that put Chesterton on the literary map, so to speak. Gilbert was already known for his pro-Boer stance, in opposition to Cecil, but he permanently made a name for himself on Fleet Street in the “Blatchford-Chesterton debates.” The two figures debated about such lofty notions as Free Will, exchanging ideas in 1903 and 1904, and culminating in Chesterton’s publication of *Heretics* in 1905 and *Orthodoxy* in 1908. Concerning the time when Chesterton was asked to respond to the pointed question, “Are you a Christian?,” Dale notes that Chesterton’s answer “is almost a recapitulation of his position in *Heretics*” (87). But the reverse is actually chronologically correct. Blatchford decried Christianity and praised Rationalism first, Chesterton first responded in a series of essays and only then published *Heretics* wherein he studied the “mistakes” of his contemporaries in order to “discover what was wrong with modern thought” (Ward 159). As Ward states, “The philosophy shaping into Orthodoxy was stimulated by newspaper controversy, and also by the talk in which Gilbert always delighted. As I have noted he loved to listen and he was a little slow in getting off the mark with his own contribution” (177-8).



Thus we see that one of Chesterton's finest and most enduring works is the product and culmination of several years of extended dialogue with serious interlocutors. The dialogical method which had begun with Cecil in the drawing room was now fueling Chesterton's literary career and his theological beliefs.

Though each had heard of the other by 1901, well before the Blatchford controversy, Chesterton did not meet George Bernard Shaw until 1906. Dale indicates that during the interim the two writers exchanged opinions through essays written for the *Daily News*, but the relationship between the two men flourished into much more than a simple literary exchange: the two men were friends for much of the remainder of Chesterton's life, however much they differed. "In purely literary terms, the 'Great Debate' officially started on December 7, 1907, in the *New Age*, with an article by Belloc called 'Thoughts About Modern Thought.' Chesterton next wrote on 'Why I Am Not A Socialist'; next Wells wrote 'About Chesterton and Belloc'; then Belloc wrote 'On Wells and A Glass of Beer.' Finally Shaw got into the act with his famous article on 'The Chesterbelloc: A Lamppoon,' which appeared on February 15, 1908" (Dale 111). In 1909, Chesterton published *George Bernard Shaw*, describing his friend as a "heathen mystic" and portraying him as "The Irishman," "The Puritan," and "The Progressive" (*Chesterton on Shaw* 363-4). "Ironically," Dale writes, "Shaw spent the next thirty years of his life trying to keep the critics from seeing how well Chesterton understood him" (130). In 1927, the two sparring partners engaged in their final debate that was eventually published the following year as *Do We Agree?*, probably the best known of their exchanges. As Dale rightly observes, by this point in time "Shaw and Chesterton had reached the point where they had

nothing more to debate, and socially—because of the physical distance between them, their different tastes, their ages, and Chesterton’s poor health—they rarely met” (266). In fact, this shows us that, though the debate with Shaw continued for years, the dialogue for Chesterton is not without end.

But the dialogue itself between Chesterton and Shaw energized them both.

As William Furlong notes:

The debates served as the raw material of art for G.B.S. and G.K.C. The Alpha of the raw material was often to be Socialism or Distributism. The Omega was always to be religion. No work demonstrated this better than Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah* (1921). G.B.S. spoke his final word on Creative Evolution in *Methuselah*, and when he sat down to write it he was considering, among other things, the ideas and person of the G.K. Chesterton he had debated so often on the same subject.

Probably few can be surprised that G.K.C. had engaged in a lifelong dialogue on religion with G.B.S. For many readers G.K.C.’s Roman Catholic religion has become almost synonymous with his art. Possibly more readers would be surprised that a dialogue on religion with G.K.C. affected deeply a phase of Shaw’s art. (153)

Surprisingly, Furlong argues for both Chesterton’s dialogical influence on Shaw and, later, argues for Shaw’s dialogical influence on Chesterton: “Nor did basic disagreement between G.B.S. and G.K.C. ever cause the controversy to grow static or meaningless. Activist Shaw was always forcing G.K.C. to rethink his position as the years rolled along. Under Shavian prodding, G.K.C. did move steadily away from the vague concept of a Catholic Socialist State to the tighter concept of a Catholic Distributism” (178). With particular reference to his political theories, Furlong demonstrates the dialogical nature of the Chesterton-Shaw relationship; open to Shaw’s influence, Chesterton’s position actually changed under Shaw’s influence.

Lastly among the lesser known of Chesterton's three interlocutors is the Dean of St. Paul's in London, the Very Reverend William Ralph Inge, to whom only scant attention is given in Chesterton's many biographies. Dale mentions him only in connection with Platonic Mysticism and Evelyn Underhill, the better to distinguish their conceptions of Christian Mysticism from Chesterton's own mystical emphasis. Maisie Ward mentions Dean Inge only with reference to the time in which they both lived but makes no significant comments concerning his interaction with Chesterton. Other biographers ignore him altogether; but as we shall see Chesterton's dialogue with Dean Inge is an important, though neglected, exchange in Chesterton's literary and theological development. To Inge we shall return in Chapter Two. For now, let it suffice to say that Chesterton regarded him as one of his chief interlocutors.

Though in reflection Chesterton mentions only three interlocutors, there were countless others. "Chesterton's old antagonist and debating opponent, H. G. Wells, had decided that the politicians and professionals building a new world order were not doing it to suit him, so he also had gone back to his favorite role of 'preacher to the world.' In his latest version of utopia, Wells was offering the postwar world salvation by history" (Dale 222). The result of course was *The Outline of History*. Chesterton eventually responded to Wells with *The Everlasting Man*, another text to be understood dialogically rather than as a monological polemic. As Michael Ffinch observes, "Perhaps it was in *The Everlasting Man*, the book published in 1925 in which 'all Chesterton's random thoughts were concentrated and refined', [sic] that the best exposition of the evil effect of Darwinism on faith is set out" (Ffinch 143).

Of trivial interest to Chesterton's dialogical development is the fact that Chesterton engaged and debated Clarence Darrow during the former's visit to America. Their show-down occurred at the Mecca in New York City in 1930.

Dale writes of the event:

Darrow and Chesterton also [in addition to Darrow's debate with William Jennings Bryan] debated the story of creation in Genesis, then discussed the history of religion, but as Chesterton commented, "When I tried to talk about Greek cults or Asiatic ascetism [he] appeared to be unable to think about anything except Jonah and the Whale.

. . . [P]eople who admired Chesterton (and that included most of the audience who voted him the winner) felt that he made a monkey out of Darrow. The famous trial lawyer not only did not stick to the point, but was unable to keep up with Chesterton, who used his debater's wit and speed. At one point, for example, when their microphone failed, Chesterton happily shouted out, "Science, you see, is not infallible! (281)

An anecdote concerning Chesterton's relationship with Shaw serves well to summarize Chesterton's dialogical development. The two were more than sparring partners. True, they held vastly different philosophies of life and even different modes of writing; but the two were always cordial, truly enjoying the company of the other. The relationship was more than a debate of ideas alone: Shaw encouraged Chesterton to write a play that Chesterton eventually completed. *Magic* was in fact the only play produced on stage during Chesterton's life. Shaw later chided Chesterton for selling it for less than its worth. The relationship between Chesterton and Shaw reveals the truth about Chesterton so eloquently put by Maise Ward, "Chesterton was one of the few great conversationalists—perhaps the only one—who would really rather listen than talk" (136). It should go without saying that true dialogue can occur only

when one is open to the other, when one can hear and enjoy listening to the other as Chesterton himself did so well.

This same thinking might be applied to his writing and public appearances as well. Dale notes, “As a writer Chesterton was always more of a debater than a philosopher” (80). Furthermore, “His American audiences noticed that Chesterton was always better in debate than in lecture, that he ‘liked to get down into the audience and have a sort of heart-to-heart talk in his high-pitched voice with its wheezy chuckle’” (Dale 226). Chesterton much preferred the personal interaction of a conversation than the impersonal nature of standing behind a lectern. Similarly, Chesterton excelled as a debater; whereas his success as a lecturer was never guaranteed (Ward 311, 313). The personal interaction of a conversation Chesterton extended to his opponents in the debating hall, wherein he avoided contentiousness even as he engaged in controversy. Both Ward and Ffinch note this in their respective biographies of G. K. C. Ward writes, “In the heat of argument he retained a fairness of mind that saw his opponent’s case and would never turn an argument into a quarrel. And most people both liked him and felt that he liked them. While he was having his great controversy with Blatchford back in 1906, it is clear from letters between them that the two men remained on the friendliest terms” (505). Similarly, Michael Ffinch finds that despite his love for controversy, Chesterton “was one of the few men who never made an enemy. The reason was that everything he said was said with such good humour. Even those whose opinions he attacked felt confident that it was only their opinions that were under attack” (3).

*Bakhtin and Dialogue*

Chesterton's dialogical style is best understood with recourse to Mikhail M. Bakhtin's literary and linguistic theory. In his discussion of stylistics, Bakhtin, a twentieth century Russian philosopher and literary theorist, declares in "Discourse in the Novel":

As treated by traditional stylistic thought, the word acknowledges only itself (that is, only its own context), its own object, its own direct expression and its own unitary and singular language. It acknowledges another word, one lying outside its own context, only as the neutral word of language, as the word of no one in particular, as simply the potential for speech. [. . .]

But no living word relates to its object in a *singular* way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate. It is precisely in the process of living interaction with this specific environment that the word may be individualized and given stylistic shape. (276)

Such a dialogical style, wherein one word is understood only in the context of another word, is employed by Chesterton in his many debates, not least of all in his writing concerning eugenics, wherein the "other's" words are Dean Inge's. This same dialogical style is at work in Chesterton's many imaginative works, particularly his use of the novel as a form, but also, and more importantly, in the actual appearance of interlocutors, each representing different philosophies.

While Chesterton himself is not Bakhtinian, Bakhtin's central thesis opens new venues for reading Chesterton. In his introduction to his translation of M. M. Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist effectively summarizes Bakhtin's central thesis:

At the heart of everything Bakhtin ever did—from what we know of his very earliest (lost) manuscripts to the very latest (still unpublished) work—is a highly distinctive concept of language. The

conception has as its enabling *a priori* an almost Manichean sense of opposition and struggle at the heart of existence, a ceaseless battle between centrifugal forces that seek to keep things apart, and centripetal forces that strive to make things cohere. This Zoroastrian clash is present in culture as well as nature, and in the specificity of individual consciousness; it is at work in the even greater particularity of individual utterances. The most complete and complex reflection of these forces is found in human language, and the best transcription of language so understood is the novel. (xvii)

Given such a description of Bakhtin's theory, one immediately sees the connection to Chesterton. The many sword fights in his fiction remind us that Chesterton himself sees life as a battle of sorts (centrifugal forces), but a romantic battle nonetheless; there is always a happy ending (centripetal forces), wherein a resolution is reached but not always a reconciliation. As he writes in *Orthodoxy*, "For the orthodox there can always be a revolution; for a revolution is a restoration. At any instant you may strike a blow for the perfection which no man has seen since Adam" (*Heretics/Orthodoxy* 264).

In order to understand more fully Bakhtin's theory of language and of the novel in particular it is necessary to first discuss the novel as a particular genre of literature and distinguish it from the epic from which it derived. The seminal distinction that Bakhtin draws between the epic and the novel is that the novel is a "developing genre" as opposed to the epic as a fixed genre:

The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process. [. . .] In the process of becoming the dominant genre, the novel sparks the renovation of all other genres, it infects them with its spirit of process and inconclusiveness. (7)

In other words, the novelist does not offer a final, authoritative word, but one that is temporarily inconclusive. On the other hand, “Epic discourse is a discourse handed down by tradition,” Bakhtin writes. “By its very nature the epic world of the absolute past is inaccessible to personal experience and does not permit an individual, personal point of view or evaluation” (16). Bakhtin continues to argue: “The epic world is an utterly finished thing, not only as an authentic event of the distant past but also on its own terms and by its own standards; it is impossible to change, to re-think, to re-evaluate anything in it. It is completed, conclusive and immutable, as a fact, an idea and a value”<sup>10</sup> (17).

But as literary history progresses, the epic begins to develop into the novel; the absolute word of the epic encounters other modifying words. As cultures interact with one another, “[t]he world becomes polyglot, once and for all and irreversibly. The period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other, comes to an end. Languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language” (Bakhtin 12).

Literary critic Roger Lundin finds a similar understanding of language at work in the poet, novelist, and essayist Wendell Berry.

In *Home Economics* Berry questions this modern tendency to study language by detaching it from objects and human actions. In what he labels the ‘specialist approach’ to language [cf. Bakhtin’s “traditional stylistics”], Berry says that we encounter the study of language “within itself. It echoes within itself, reverberating endlessly like a voice echoing within a cave.” Such examination of language as an object in itself yields surprising insights, but it leads

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<sup>10</sup>Bakhtin is thinking of the epic, not the living tradition of the church. He writes, “tradition [is] isolated the world of the epic from personal experience, from any new insights, from any personal initiative in understanding an interpreting, from new points of view and evaluations” (17). This is vastly different from the living tradition of the Church. See Daniel H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism*. (Eerdmans, 1999.)



to a severely limited understanding of nature and history. To think of language solely as a system of signifiers referring to each other is to ignore the rich relationships between words and deeds and things. It is the essence of language “to turn outward to the world, to strike its worldly objects cleanly and cease to echo—to achieve a kind of rest and silence in them.” Or as [philosopher Paul] Ricoeur explains: “The structural point of view also excludes . . . the primary intention of language, which is to say something about something.” (92-3)

Furthermore, Lundin contends that “The goal of all thinking, and all reading [. . .] is to test, clarify, modify, and expand our assumptions in order to bring them more in line with the truth of things” (223). This deeply Christian understanding of dialogue is not endless chatter, but engagement with the truth.

Bakhtin contends that dialogue as such does not destroy the epic, but rather that laughter—the familiarizing process—brings the epic to a close.

It is precisely laughter that destroys the epic, and in general destroys any hierarchical (distancing and valorized) distance. As a distanced image a subject cannot be comical; to be made comical, it must be brought close. [. . .] Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it. (23)

“In Menippean satire,” particularly, Bakhtin notes, “the unfettered and fantastic plots and situations all serve one goal—to put to the test and to expose ideas and ideologies” (26). The epic speaks of an absolute past with which the author and the reader alike cannot interact. When someone begins to interact with the epic in written form, the novel emerges. The epic as a piece of language is monological—it is the chronicler of the epic hero’s language. The novel as a piece of language is polyglot. There is at a minimum both the narrative and the reader’s interaction with that narrative. Necessarily then, the epic and the novel differ in their relation to time. “The novel comes into contact with the

spontaneity of the inconclusive present; this is what keeps the genre from congealing. The novelist is drawn toward everything that is not yet completed” (Bakhtin 27). In contrast to the “absolute” world of the epic, Bakhtin writes:

The temporal world [of the novel] changes radically: it becomes a world where there is no first word (no ideal word), and the final word has not yet been spoken. [. . .] Every event, every phenomenon, every thing, every object of artistic representation loses its completedness, its hopelessly finished quality and its immutability that had been so essential to it in the world of the epic ‘absolute past,’ walled off by an unapproachable boundary from the continuing and unfinished present. (30)

Yet the novel, again unlike the epic, cannot itself be classified as a monologic genre; the development of the novel, while indeed a development of literary genre, is not the development of an absolute genre. The novel “is by its very nature, not canonic. It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review. Such, indeed, is the only possibility open to a genre that structures itself in a zone of direct contact with developing reality” (Bakhtin 39).

After distinguishing the novel from its predecessor, Bakhtin proceeds to examine discourse in the novel, as he titles the essay. He begins with a clear statement of his theory regarding discourse in the novel:

[T]he study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract ‘formal’ approach and an equally abstract ‘ideological’ approach. Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon—social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning. (259)

The study of the novel in particular cannot divide itself between form and content because the two co-inhere within the novel itself. Bakhtin succinctly states, “the

style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its 'languages'" (262). Thus are style and content in the novel inseparable, as Bakhtin explains in his more extended definition of the novel: "The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (262). The novelist artistically arranges a language that Bakhtin contends is internally "stratified" into a multiplicity of languages identifiable in various dialects, jargons, slogans, etc. "[T]his stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence," Bakhtin argues, "is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre (262-3). This is the combination of languages that gives the novel its own language, which is to say that the novelist's voice is the cacophony of voices that he unifies within the novel itself. Such an artistic design necessarily depends on the intrinsic polyglot nature of language. Rather than depending on the unity of language, Bakhtin understands the novel to require such "internal stratification" for "authentic novelistic prose" (264). Yet Bakhtin does not ignore the resulting dilemma posed for traditional stylistics. Given the multiform style of the novel, the novel must either be considered something other than art, or else traditional stylistics themselves must expand in order to fully examine the emerging art form (267). One formalist solution to this dilemma—Bakhtin notes that Gustav Shpet makes recourse to it—is to reduce the novel to rhetoric, thus denying the undeniable artistic merits of the novel as a form of literature (268). But as Bakhtin argues, even though "[t]he novel, and artistic prose in general, has the closest genetic, family relationship to rhetorical forms [, . . .] novelistic discourse preserved its

own qualitative uniqueness and was never reducible to rhetorical discourse” (269). As Bakhtin succinctly puts it, “The novel is an artistic genre” (269).

Bakhtin’s real strength lies in the solution to this stylistic dilemma, and the solution hinges on the fact that Bakhtin sees “language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a maximum of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life” (271). Such a unified language works to unify thought. A “unitary language gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization” (271). Yet while language is “ideologically saturated,” the “centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a ‘unitary language,’ operate in the midst of heteroglossia,” so that one ideological language competes for meaning in the context other ideological languages (271). “From this point of view,” Bakhtin writes, “literary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages—and in its turn is also stratified into languages (generic, period-bound and others)” (271). This stratifying process continues, further expanding the language as long as it lives and occurring simultaneously within a unified ideology (Bakhtin 271).

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. [. . . T]he utterance not only answers the requirements of its own languages as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity. (Bakhtin 271)

Each concrete utterance competes for meaning within the context of heteroglossia; the utterance is itself a unified combination of languages (Bakhtin 272). The novel, then, is the artistic combination of those unifying and disunifying aspects of both one and many language(s) in contact with (an)other language(s). In its essence, the novel is dialogical in form and content, as Bakhtin indicates:

From the point of view of stylistics, the artistic work as a whole—whatever that whole might be—is a self-sufficient and closed authorial monologue, one that presumes only passive listeners beyond its own boundaries. Should we imagine the work as a rejoinder in a given dialogue, whose style is determined by its interrelationship with other rejoinders in the same dialogue (in the totality of the conversation)—then traditional stylistics does not offer an adequate means for approaching such a dialogized style. (273-4)

Given Bakhtin's theory, the literary critic and novelist alike then must either ascribe to traditional stylistics and devalue the artistic merit of the novel as a genre or consider the fact that "[t]he dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse, creates the potential for a distinctive art of prose, which has found its fullest and deepest expression in the novel" (275). Succinctly put:

What is present in the novel is an artistic system of languages, or more accurately a system of images of languages, and the real task of stylistic analysis consists in uncovering all the available orchestrating language in the composition of the novel, grasping the precise degree of distancing that separates each language from its most immediate semantic instantiation in the work as a whole, and the varying angles of refractions of intentions within it, understanding their dialogic interrelationships and—finally—if there is direct authorial discourse, determining the heteroglot background outside the work that dialogizes it. (Bakhtin 416)

The task for the literary critic of the novel is to show the system of languages at work in the novel itself; but far from dismissing content and meaning, meaning actually explodes in the novel when understood in this way.<sup>11</sup> As Bakhtin says from the beginning, form and content co-inhere in the novel. Considering the application of this approach to literary classics, Bakhtin makes absolutely clear that his is not a relativistic theory.

The historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation. Thanks to the intentional potential embedded in them, such works have proved capable of uncovering in each era and against ever new dialogizing backgrounds ever newer aspects of meaning; their semantic content literally continues to grow, to further create out of itself. (421)

The theory does not allow critics to dismiss meaning, but provides them the theory to explain meaning that continues to develop and unfold. As Lundin states:

According to Gadamer, human understanding is most fruitfully conceived of as a form of dialogue in which the horizon of our prejudices is fused with that of the other's as we both gaze upon the object or truth in question: "The task of hermeneutics is to clarify this miracle of understanding, which is not a mysterious communion of souls, but sharing in a common meaning." To understand another person, or a book, then, one does not put on another's glasses to see the object through entirely different eyes; instead, one looks with another upon the object and enters into dialogue in search of understanding. (223)

Chesterton's work seems to be undergirded by a similar understanding of dialogical engagement.

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<sup>11</sup>Lest one fear the relativizing of truth, I offer David L. Jeffrey's distinction between the word of God and the word of man in Bakhtin's language: "God's Word and the words of men and women are certainly not identical[. . .] In Bakhtin's terms, it remains normatively 'dialogic'; humans do not authorize any 'absolute word'" (Jeffrey 7).

### *Eugenics and Dialogue*

Specifically, we are examining Chesterton's dialogical role in the eugenics debate of the early twentieth century as a template through which to view Chesterton's larger dialogical style. Even more narrowly, we will examine in chapters two and three the dialogue between Dean W. R. Inge and G. K. Chesterton on eugenics; but first it is necessary to explain the context surrounding the eugenics discussion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. What Chesterton, in his *Eugenics and Other Evils*, labeled the "Feeble-Minded Bill" was the furiously debated Mental Deficiency Act of 1912, which was re-written and passed by Parliament as the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913. The changes between the 1912 and 1913 Acts were substantial, and Chesterton, though himself not an MP, ought to receive at least partial credit for the changes. Most significantly, the language of eugenics, sterilization, and certain marriage restrictions were deleted from the bill that eventually passed. But this is the end of the story; eugenics begins with a curious scientist named Francis Galton.

The term "eugenics"—literally good genes—was first coined by the British scientist Francis Galton, cousin to Charles Darwin, in 1883. What developed was a new "science" dedicated to the improvement of the human race. Simply put, Galton believed that he could apply to human breeding the same principles and practices that applied to the genetic improvement of plants and animals. The goal, in stark Nietzschean terms, was to produce a race of Supermen, a fundamentally superior human stock; and Galton was not radical nor alone in his thinking. As Daniel Kevles notes, "In 1891, in a book entitled *The Rapid Multiplication of the Unfit*, Victoria Woodhull had observed: "The best minds of

today have accepted the fact that if superior people are desired, they must be bred; and if imbeciles, criminals, paupers, and [the] otherwise unfit are undesirable citizens they must not be bred” (85).

Though the term was coined during Victoria’s reign, eugenics pervaded the Edwardian milieu that the discussion of eugenics blossomed. The Victorian period had seen vast industrialization and the subsequent increase of poverty stricken families, as rural farming communities were off the farm and into the cities for employment. Such conditions would have been impossible to ignore in Edwardian London. Coupled with this displacement was the rising influence of Darwinian scientific theories and Malthusian economic theories. In particular, Malthus foresaw a vast increase in population, one that would overwhelm Victorian England. At the same time the physician Cesare Lombroso purported that criminal behavior was genetically linked to the shape of one’s skull. Furthermore, the idea of “race-suicide” circulated widely among Britain’s ruling classes. Many believed that the genetically superior classes in England were not reproducing themselves as bountifully as were the genetically inferior working class and poor of England. This is the matrix in which eugenics blossomed: the increasing level of poverty, the increasing fear related to the uncontrollable nature of criminality, the increasing fear of overpopulation, the increasing belief in Darwinian evolutionary progress, and the increasing belief in race-suicide. Amidst all of this, Galton suggests that the human race can be improved, that race-suicide<sup>12</sup> can be prevented, through his new science, eugenics.

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<sup>12</sup>Race-suicide was the common term to denote the increasing fear that the English “race” was moving towards decimation because of the proliferation of the poor and working classes and the decrease of the middle and upper classes.



As Kevles notes in his definitive study entitled *In the Name of Eugenics*, “Galton first published his eugenic ideas in 1865—well before he coined the word itself—in a two-part article for *Macmillian’s Magazine* which he subsequently expanded into a book, *Hereditary Genius*, published in 1869” (3). Karl Pearson, a leader in the burgeoning field of British eugenics, defined the pseudo-science as “the practical application of genetic science toward the improvement of the genetic health of future generations” (qtd. in Kühn 4). Galton defined it more simply as the “science of improving the stock” (qtd. in Kühn 4). Leonard Darwin, son of the famed scientist, explicitly connected his father’s discoveries to the burgeoning science of eugenics: “A belief in evolution opens out before our eyes possibilities of almost unlimited improvement in the lot of mankind in the distant future. We are also thus led to see that those who care for the future welfare of their country should make it one of their main aims to attend to the breed of their race. And eugenics tells us in what ways we can do this” (*What* 9). But as G. R. Searle points out, the new Darwinists differed radically from their predecessors. “Unlike Spencerian Social Darwinists, eugenists did not favour a policy of minimum State intervention. They rather wished to replace natural selection by ‘rational selection’” (46).

In an even more explicit passage wherein he seeks to legitimize the scientific aspects of eugenics, the younger Darwin states,

[W]e know for certain that the natural qualities of parents will reappear amongst their descendants to such an extent as to enable us to foretell in no small degree the characteristics of the coming generation. This is true of mental and bodily qualities, and of good and bad qualities. Is it not, therefore, worse than folly to allow parents with bad natural qualities to have more children than those

who are better endowed? Eugenics seeks to lessen this folly in the future. (*What* 19)

In case anyone questioned the nobility and logic of their aims, Darwin writes, “If our object is to try to improve the breed of man, should we not first of all decide on the kind of man most to be desired? (*What* 25). Darwin himself recognized one of the fundamental difficulties with state-sponsored eugenics-based practices: “The aim of eugenics being to lessen the fertility of all inferior stocks, whilst increasing the fertility of all the superior, we should seek for some method of deciding in which of these two equal divisions any individual should be placed” (*What* 8).

While Darwin sought to connect eugenics to evolutionary theory in his definition of the science, Margaret Sanger, American Birth Control advocate of that time, sought to distance the new science from the Socialists:

Eugenics has been defined as “the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either mentally or physically.” While there is not inherent conflict between Socialism and Eugenics, the latter is, broadly, the antithesis of the former. In its propaganda, Socialism emphasizes the evil effects of our industrial and economic system. It insists upon the necessity of satisfying material need, upon sanitation, hygiene, and education to effect the transformation of society. The Socialist insists that healthy humanity is impossible without a radical improvement of the social—and therefore of the economic and industrial—environment. The Eugenist points out that heredity is the great determining factor in the lives of men and women. Eugenics is the attempt to solve the problem from the biological and evolutionary point of view. (*Pivot* 170-71)

Despite the differences from which they approached the new science, all of its supporters viewed eugenics as a scientific means of improving the human stock and thus the key to improving human nature itself. As Christine Rosen argues, eugenics was the root of many social reforms all attempting to improve

humankind: “If the trunk of the eugenics tree was the work of Galton and other ‘official’ eugenisists, then its branches grew to include purity reform, health reform, sex hygiene, radical sex reform, marriage counseling, antvice campaigns, ‘fitter family’ contests, the child-rearing advice industry, and, eventually, the birth control movement” (11). It is without surprise then to find the names of Leonard Darwin, Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt, Alexander Graham Bell, Charles Davenport, Charles W. Eliot (president of Harvard), Oliver Wendell Holmes (Chief Justice of the Supreme Court), David Starr Jordan (president of Stanford), and Henry Sheldon among the supporters of eugenics. Against this widespread summons to human improvement Winston Churchill writes in a way that remarkably resembles the man whom he destroyed, Adolf Hitler himself:

The unnatural and increasingly rapid growth of the feeble-minded and insane classes, coupled as it is with a steady restriction among all the thrifty, energetic and superior stocks, constitutes a national and race danger which it is impossible to exaggerate. [. . .] I feel that the source from which all the streams of madness is fed should be cut off and sealed up before the year has passed. . . .[A] simple surgical operation would allow these individuals to live in the world without causing much inconvenience to others. (qtd. in Bruinius 6)

### *Positive and Negative Eugenics*

As Darwin and Churchill both implied, the so-called science of eugenics was divided into two strands: positive eugenics and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics was the seemingly benign advocacy of an increase of superior stocks. Galton believed that he could link genetically superior stocks to the upper classes of English society. These classes of people, Galton believed, were declining at a rapid rate in contrast to the rapid increase in the number of children born to genetically inferior groups of people, namely the poor and working poor. Hence

the need for negative eugenics to segregate and sterilize the so-called unfit. “‘Negative eugenics,’ in [Karl] Pearson’s words, attempted ‘to free future generations from avoidable genetically transmitted handicaps.’ ‘Positive eugenics,’ on the other hand, sought to ‘raise the overall genetic quality of the nation by ensuring a superior birth rate among the genetically better-endowed’” (Kühl 5).

The divide between British eugenics and particularly American eugenics has to do largely with legal developments. As Kevles notes, “British eugenicists marveled at the extent to which their American counterparts managed to write such a comprehensive negative-eugenics program onto the statute books” (100). He suggests that the distinction, at least in part, is attributable to the fact that such legislation could be passed state by state in the U.S., as opposed to the more difficult task of passing nationally in England (101). This is demonstrated well by the respective emphases of Leonard Darwin and Margaret Sanger. Concerning the chief tactic of negative eugenics, Darwin writes, “Sterilization has been altogether condemned as being an unjust interference with the liberty of the individual. Now, whatever force there may be in this objection, it can apply only to the operation if performed compulsorily. Whether compulsion in this matter should ever be legalised is a question which may perhaps be left to those who come after us to decide” (*What* 40). Though he nowhere condemns negative eugenics but implicitly approves of such methods, Darwin understood well that positive eugenics would have a much greater appeal in British society.

Margaret Sanger, on the other hand, pushed for negative eugenic reforms in America, detailing the value of this particular strain of eugenics.

Eugenics is chiefly valuable in its negative aspects. [...] On its so-called positive or constructive side, it fails to awaken any permanent interest. [...] On its negative side it shows us that we are paying for and even submitting to the dictates of an ever increasing, unceasingly spawning class of *human beings who never should have been born at all*—that the wealth of individuals and of states is being diverted from the development and the progress of human expression and civilization. (*Pivot* 187 italics added)

To this problem of “an ever increasing, unceasingly spawning class,”

Sanger offered a radical new solution: Birth Control.

The great principle of Birth Control offers the means whereby the individual may adapt himself to and even control the forces of environment and heredity. [...] Birth Control which has been criticized as negative and destructive, is really the greatest and most truly eugenic method, and its adoption as part of the program of Eugenics would immediately give a concrete and realistic power to that science. As a matter of fact, Birth Control has been accepted by the most clear thinking and far seeing of the Eugenists themselves as the most constructive and necessary of the means to racial health. (*Pivot* 189)

The footnote lists Dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral W. R. Inge as “the most clear thinking and far seeing” supporter of Eugenics who shared her wisdom.

### *The Feeble-Minded*

Though many groups were the targets of negative eugenics, the particularly controversial targets in America and Britain alike were the “feeble-minded.” As Darwin states, “We can at all events assert that there are many kinds of men that we do not want. These include the criminal, the insane, the imbecile, the feeble in mind, the diseased at birth, the deformed, the deaf, the blind, etc., etc.” (*What* 25). The feebleminded were particularly controversial because they were not as easily identifiable as the other members of Darwin’s list, but they were plentiful.

Reliable estimates shew [sic] that out of every 1000 persons in this country there are between four and five who may be described as feeble in mind, imbeciles, or idiots. The total number in England and Wales of those who are so poorly endowed by nature as to have been incapable of profiting by ordinary education when of age is about 350,000 in all. These facts are appalling, especially when we call to mind the suffering of parents when discovering that their child is feeble-minded or worse and utterly different from the being so hopefully pictured in advance. As to actual idiots, after visiting an institution where numbers of these creatures are being dragged through a useless and senseless existence, everyone must wish that something more might be done to prevent all such as these from entering the world. (*What* 44)

Feeble-minded—they were called “morons” in America—together with imbecile, and idiot were technical specifications regarding the degree to which one suffered mental abnormality; the feeble-minded were also labeled “inferior” and “unfit.” As Darwin indicates, “The inferior include in their ranks the stupid, the careless, the inefficient, the intractable, the idle, the habitual drunkard, as well as those too feeble in body or in health to do a good day’s work (*What* 57). It was a large canvas under which many undesirables fit all too easily. Rosen discusses the obvious difficulty in making such a diagnosis:

Contained in the family studies of the 1910s is another shift in the eugenics movement’s rhetoric about degeneracy. The feeble-minded, formerly a problem, had now become a palpable threat to society, a “menace” that must be eliminated. This new tone emerged in part through the efforts of professional eugenicists such as Goddard who were using more sophisticated tests for diagnosing feeble-mindedness—and claiming that diagnosis was the task of experts. In describing the feeble-mindedness of a young woman from a degenerate family, for example, Kite noted, “She is attractive, and only a trained eye could readily detect her deficiency.” Another researcher from the Vineland Training School, Alexander Johnson, made a similar point about his new class of the “invisible” feeble-minded: “Their defectiveness is seldom recognized without careful scientific tests, so that, although they constitute a far greater danger to the social order than their feebler brothers and sisters, comparatively few of them get into institutions for defectives. (79)

Harry Bruinius, in his landmark study *Better for All the World*, points to the same difficulty of diagnosis.

These families were a breed afflicted by this low-grade mental deficiency called “feeble-mindedness,” the primary cause, Dr. Bell and other reformers believed, of the social ills weakening the fabric of the nation. . . . To the untrained layperson, someone afflicted with feeble-mindedness might even appear normal. So scientists had just devised a new term for these unmasked defectives: “morons.” These people engaged in the unhealthy and antisocial practice of masturbation, which led to sexual impurity and hosts of illegitimate children. These frequented saloons and whorehouses, filled state almshouses and prisons, and worse of all, passed their feebleminded genes to their children. (5)

While feeblemindedness was initially difficult to diagnose, Bruinius indicates that an alleged consistency did develop. Feebleminded began “to take on a specific, technical definition that described the ‘simple backward boy or girl.’ The illness of these simpletons was so subtle and so hard to diagnose that it had never before been noticed” (37). The feebleminded were difficult to detect because they were highly functioning members of society, but according to the social scientists of the time the feebleminded were plagued with wills incapable of allowing them to exercise good judgment. They were “‘easily influenced for evil’ and susceptible to antisocial, deviant behavior” (37).

The case of Carrie Buck is perhaps the best illustration of persons labeled feebleminded. Hers is a story well-known in the history of eugenics, but it bears retelling. Carrie Buck, a poor, Virginian girl, the feebleminded daughter of a feebleminded mother, who had given birth to an illegitimate child, assumed to be feebleminded herself, was considered a nuisance, a menace to society. As Bruinius writes:

Carrie might have seemed a normal girl, if sassy and simple and even a little slow. But Dr. Bell knew she carried within her, like the taint of original sin, the defective ‘germ-plasm’ she would pass on to her children. A defect in her genes made her unusually promiscuous, unable to control herself, and prone to bear a child out of wedlock without shame. It kept her—and her mother Emma before her—from being a productive, law-abiding citizen. And he could say with all confidence, too, that Carrie’s illegitimate daughter Vivian, not quite three years old, would follow the same wanton path. (5)

To solve the problem and to create a solution for many other problem cases, Carrie was forcibly sterilized. In a case engineered by Dr. Bell, the Supreme Court of the United States in *Buck v. Bell* upheld the legality of Carrie Buck’s sterilization against her will. In so doing, the Supreme Court effectively endorsed negative eugenics. “Sterilization received a quick legal affirmation by the Supreme Court: in the landmark *Buck v. Bell*, the Court upheld Virginia’s sterilization of a seventeen-year-old third-generation “moron,” effectively licensing state sterilization policies” (McGee 9).

The esteemed Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote the Supreme Court’s decision. Because of his honored place in American legal history and because his statement indicates the world opinion at that time, it is worthwhile to quote him exactly. Having deemed Carrie Buck the feeble-minded daughter of a feeble-minded mother and the mother of “probable” feeble-minded children, Holmes demanded Carrie Buck’s sterilization in patriotic terms, suggesting that it was for the betterment of society:

We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the State for these lesser sacrifices, often not felt to be such by those concerned, in order to prevent our being swamped with incompetence. It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate



offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. The principle that sustains compulsory vaccination is broad enough to cover cutting the Fallopian tubes. *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, 197 U. S. 11. Three generations of imbeciles are enough.” (qtd. in Bajema 161, 207)

As it turns out, Carrie’s daughter Vivian was an honor student in school before she died at a young age. Now that sterilization was a legalized method of dealing with feeble-mindedness, however, the vagueness of defining feeble-minded allowed negative eugenics to prosper along many different lines.

### *Eugenics and Racism and Classism*

Broadly speaking, British eugenics developed along class lines, whereas American eugenics developed more broadly along racial lines. As Pauline Mazumdar argues:

[T]he background of eugenics in Britain differs from that in America, where race rather than class was more important. It differs from that in Germany, too, where, apart from the racist strain, the focus of so-called main-line eugenics was on the importance of weeding out the psychotic taint from the population. The emphasis on the dangerousness of the *Lumpenproletariat*, the urban poor or social problem group as a class, seems to have been peculiarly British. (38)

Even though British eugenics developed more along class lines, the language of preserving the “English Race” filled eugenics manifestos. Leonard Darwin related eugenics to emigration and immigration policies. He demanded that “all aliens joining our nation from outside would be in quality at least as good as those of our own compatriots who were simultaneously leaving our shores for ever” (*Need* 489-90). This was necessary, he argued, to prevent the “dysgenic effects” of persons of “fine” lineage leaving replaced by persons of “low” heritage (*Need* 489-90).

Not only was Britain in danger of the “dysgenic effects” of immigration and emigration, but the world over, as Darwin articulated it, suffered from the dysgenic effects of miscegenation. Such intermarrying of the races produced “evil social effects” and harmful biological results according to Darwin. Yet even though Darwin recognized a biological superiority to some children of mixed racial lineage, he did not deny the ultimately racist underpinnings of his aims:

It is true that the best American evidence points to the conclusion that the mulatto is inferior to the white man and superior to the Negro; but as the aim of eugenics should be the production in future ages of the highest type attainable, it must be wrong to attempt to raise the black races by any process which would result in a lowering of the white stock; and this would be the result of miscegenation if the mixed stock is intermediate in value between the two parent stocks. (*Need* 496)

While Darwin feared the dysgenic effects of miscegenation in Britain particularly, Americans employed the language of eugenics to advance racism as well as classism. It comes as no surprise that Margaret Sanger’s first clinic “was set up in a Brooklyn slum neighborhood peopled so largely by poor immigrant Italian and Jewish families that the handbills she distributed were printed in three languages—Italian, Yiddish, and English” (Chase 54).

### *International Eugenics*

While these ideas began in Britain, they quickly found root on American soil. Whereas in England, eugenics was easily linked to classism, in America a certain racism was added. The British debated and eventually rejected sterilization, but in America such actions became commonplace. And it did not stop there. As Elof Carlson notes, “Eugenics [. . .] swept through Europe and found sympathy in other continents. By 1912 the first International Eugenics

Congress was meeting in London. [. . .] What they [the various countries represented] had in common was a belief that human or societal control over reproduction was essential to preserve the heredity of the nation” (265). In the words of Adolf Hitler:

The *volkisch* state must see to it that only the healthy beget children. . . .Here the state must act as the guardian of a millennial future. . . . It must put the most modern medical means in the service of this knowledge. It must declare unfit for propagation all who are in any way visibly sick or who have inherited a disease and can therefore pass it on. (qtd. in Lifton 22)

And so they did. As McGee notes, one of Adolf Hitler’s first acts was a Eugenic Sterilization Law that found its support in similar American legislation. The 1933 law demanded the sterilization of mentally retarded persons and those related to them, while the 1934 emendation added the feeble-minded to the list (9). As Kevles notes the law applied to “all people, institutionalized or not, who suffered from allegedly hereditary disabilities, including feeblemindedness, schizophrenia, epilepsy, blindness, severe drug or alcohol addiction, and physical deformities that seriously interfered with locomotion or were grossly offensive” (116). As Bruinius notes, some 150,000 Germans were sterilized in fewer than two years, “preparing the way for the genocide to come” (17).

Robert Jay Lifton, in his work *The Nazi Doctors*, delineates the path that runs from segregation and sterilization to genocide. “Of the five identifiable steps by which the Nazis carried out the principle of ‘life unworthy of life,’ coercive sterilization was the first” (21). Hitler’s “Final Solution” was not an aberrant, German practice, but rather the logical extension and pragmatic implementation of Galton’s eugenical ideas. It was the application of science to social policy. This

was the end of eugenics, a “science” that began in England and blossomed in America, providing a model and a pathway for the Nazi regime. And it is within this context that G. K. Chesterton courageously entered the dialogue and debate.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “The Gloomy Dean”: Chesterton’s Chief Interlocutor in the Eugenic Debate

#### *From Eton College to Gloomy Dean*

In his 24 February 1923 installment of the *Illustrated London News*, G. K. Chesterton declared, “When I began to write, my antagonist was Mr. Robert Blatchford; then it was Mr. Bernard Shaw; of later years it has generally been the Dean of St. Paul’s” (48). This final interlocution between the two figures centered upon the then-burgeoning science of eugenics. The Very Reverend William Ralph Inge, known as the “Gloomy Dean” for his pessimism, was Dean of St. Paul’s from 1911 to 1934, friend to Margaret Sanger, and an avid supporter of eugenics and state-sponsored eugenic practices, publishing many essays and sermons supporting eugenics; thus Chesterton found in Dean Inge the perfect interlocutor for his own position against eugenics.

Unlike the strand of eugenics that was developing in America and Germany at the time, eugenics in Britain did not develop along racial lines but along class lines; perhaps, this was the initial attraction for Inge. As he made clear in his own writings, Inge himself descended from the clerical aristocracy. As Horton Davies points out, “He knew little of ordinary middle-class life and nothing at all of the working classes. He was, therefore, singularly badly equipped to minister to the age that has been called ‘the century of the common man’” (246). He attended secondary school at Eton College, then matriculated at King’s College, Cambridge, where he was a student of Classics. After graduating,

he returned to Eton, serving as assistant master. Following a short teaching career at Eton, he moved to Hertford College, Oxford, where he served as tutor, then to All Saints Church, Ennismore Gardens (now a Russian Orthodox Cathedral) where he served as vicar.

During this early time in his long and illustrious career, he delivered the Bampton Lectures in 1891, the Gifford Lectures in 1917, the Romanes and Hibbert Lectures in 1920, and held the Lady Margaret Professorship of Divinity from 1907-1911 (Dark 214). As Sidney Dark points out, “When Mr. Asquith chose him as successor to Dean Gregory he was known among scholars as a man of profound learning and original thought. But he was almost entirely ignorant of the work of the Church in its connection with the workaday world, and he knew nothing of the doubts and fears, the hopes and aspirations of the average man for whom the Church was created” (209). However, it was at St. Paul’s that Dean Inge shifted from academician to something of a “newspaper personality” (Dark 214). As Dark writes, “Dr. Inge had not long been settled in the Deanery of St. Paul’s before in various public utterances he denounced the present and foretold doom in the immediate future. He was at once christened ‘the gloomy Dean’ by the *Daily Mail*, and he obtained a newspaper notoriety which he has been shrewd enough to fully exploit. The pious dean, the learned dean, even the eloquent dean might have remained unregarded outside ecclesiastical circles, but a gloomy dean was certain of nation-wide fame” (215). But Inge denied such charges of dourness, claiming that the “charge of pessimism that has been brought against me is ridiculous. No Christian can be a pessimist. Christianity is a system of radical optimism, [. . .] it asserts that all will be well, some day and somehow.

(*The Church and the Age* xiii). In fact, shortly before his death he said in an interview, “But don’t call me the Gloomy Dean. I never deserved that. I have tried only to face reality, to be honest and refuse to be foolishly optimistic” (“*De Senectute*”). Nevertheless, the name stuck. Among British society’s worst problems, the “Gloomy Dean” saw racial decline and what he called the population question.<sup>1</sup> To solve these ever-increasing social problems, Inge looked to the burgeoning science of eugenics.

Dark astutely notes the discrepancy between Inge’s perspective and that of the common man’s. It seems, Dark contends, that Inge remained unaware of the worker’s plight even after the Great War.

Dr. Inge looks out of his deanery windows and sees the world as a steep slope reaching down into the sea. The upper and professional classes are being destroyed by taxation, though he declares that it is a fact beyond argument that ‘the children of the upper middle classes are intrinsically far better endowed than the children of unskilled labourers.’ The gifted stocks are dying out and power is coming more and more into the hands of ‘Trade union officials and political agitator.’ The fact no longer fecund has compelled him, as I have said, to a half-hearted advocacy of birth prevention. (224-25)

The connection to Inge’s aristocratic upbringing and his interest in eugenics is obvious. To solve the economic problem, Inge did not so much seek to alleviate the plight of the whole as to alleviate society of the worker. Dark continues, “The Dean’s conception of society is essentially aristocratic. It is for the gifted and cultured few to command and for the mass to obey. With Nietzsche and Gobineau, the Dean fears that our civilization will come to its end, as the

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<sup>1</sup>The term “race” was employed by Dean Inge and generally in that time period to denote ethnicity but more broadly to denote a group of people so that he might also mean the British people. The population question was not unrelated: racial decline, an increase in the population among the lower classes and a decrease in the population among the upper classes all “threatened” the stability of the Western states, particularly for Inge the English race.

civilizations that have preceded it have come to their end, if the gifted and cultured lose their grip, if, while retaining the desire to command, they have no longer the power to enforce obedience to their order” (222). Elsewhere, Dark explains the Dean’s position in stark Nietzschean terms, “The race is for the swift, and it ought to be for the swift. To give the slow even a consolation prize is merely mawkish. The battle is for the strong, and ought to be for the strong, and it is right and proper that the weak should be bashed over the head and should learn to regard the bashing as no more than their deserts” (227). Surely Inge would have objected to Dark’s harsh description, but the fact remains that Inge clearly championed the rich over the poor, the strong over the weak. In contradistinction to Chesterton’s love of the common man and hate for Calvinism (the connection will be spelled out in a later chapter), Dark claims that Inge’s position constitutes the most despicable of Calvinistic theologies:

God becomes, not the father of all men, but merely the father of the supermen, and the rest of us are left out in the cold. The doctrine is Calvinism in a more horrid and exclusive sense, for the Calvinist may believe that the simple and the undisciplined and the blundering are possibly among the elect, while Dr. Inge’s Heaven would in practice be reserved for men and women capable of taking a double first. (247-8)

In summary, Dark concludes that “This gospel of the Neoplatonist Christian is useless to the workaday world” (245).

### *Inge’s Neoplatonism*

What may seem unrelated to his position concerning eugenics, Dark astutely adduces: Inge’s Neoplatonist version of Christianity was not disconnected from his social positions. It was at Oxford that Inge developed what



would become a life-long reputation as an “exponent of Christian mysticism” (Fox 44). As Inge himself states in his Preface to *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems*, “From the time when I was ordained priest at the age of thirty-two, I have been convinced that the centre of gravity in theology was moving from authority to religious experience, and it was this conviction which led me to the study of Christian Mysticism, the subject of my Bampton Lectures in 1899” (v). In the Apostle Paul, Plato, and most fully in Plotinus, Inge found his guides to what he considered a genuine and necessary third way of Christian expression. As Davies declares, Inge claimed “that Christianity was neither wholly other-worldly nor entirely this-worldly, and so would offend both the pietists who wished only to save their own souls and the social reformers who had repudiated eternal life” (250).

Inge’s interest in Neoplatonism led him to question unquestionable authorities. He did not deny that authority for the Christian must be granted to the Church, the Scripture, reason, and experience, which he called “mystical revelation,” but he did question their authoritative rank. “The important question is,” he says, “which of them comes first” (*The Church in the World* 2). In Neoplatonic thought, Inge argues, “Christianity reverts to what it was at first—an individual and universal religion. In such favourable circumstances reason and illumination—philosophy and mysticism—become again the guides of thought and practice” (*Church in the World* 3). Religious authority granted chiefly to individual experience is the chief feature of his Platonic thought, which Inge argues is Protestantism correctly understood. “For the strength of Protestantism,” Inge argues, “lies not in theories of inspiration and special

providences; it lies in personal devotion to Christ, and in the duty of individual judgment, under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth” (*Church in the World* 26). Inge himself connects this Neoplatonic understanding of Christianity to solving modern problems: “it is in personal religion that the Christian recovers the faith of the original Gospel, and an unassailable basis for confronting the problems of the future” (*Church in the World* 26). Thus the basis for confronting the question of eugenics to which he devotes so much attention is clearly related to his understanding of Neoplatonic Christianity. It is not the Church, nor Tradition, nor the Scriptures, but experience followed by reason that provides the basis for evaluating the merits of eugenics as a solution to the problems of racial decline and the population question. In so doing, he not only elevates experience and reason to authoritative status, but also rejects all infallible sources of authority. By rejecting the Scripture in particular as an infallible authority, he rightly observed the connection between the authority of the Church and the authority of Scripture, and he knew that higher criticism had severely undermined them both. As Helm contends, the Dean did not see another choice than to reject these authorities as infallible (17-18). As Inge stated himself, “Christianity is not a religion of the book. If its Founder had wished it to be a religion of a book, he would have written or dictated the book himself” (*Pacifist* 29). Were it not for a dismissal of the nonsensical belief in the infallibility of the Scripture, and the Church for that matter, Inge argues that “it would be difficult for any educated man to be a Christian” (*Pacifist* 96-7). He recognized the fundamental shift that had occurred with the advent of modern scientific thought, holding that science and Scripture could not well be reconciled without experience and reason re-

emerging as the primary authorities of Christianity, which he argues were its original sources of authority (*Christian Ethics and Modern Problems* 3).

Such authority, he argued, “ought to aim at making itself superfluous. We cannot do without it, but our progress in the spiritual life may be measured by the extent to which our Faith rests no longer on authority but on experience” (*The Church in the World* 248). This, of course, gives experience final authoritative status. Rather than being based on a series of infallible authorities, Inge interpreted Christianity as based on a transvaluation of all values centered in personal experience and reason (*Outspoken, Second Series* 248). As Helm notes, “To a considerable extent, then, the Dean's treatment of Christian theology becomes an examination of the mode of religious awareness and its data as related to the central Christian doctrine that God as person became incarnate that men might be lifted up to Him” (112). The emphasis is not on the Incarnation itself but on “men being lifted up to Him.” “Christianity, as I have said elsewhere, is a revolutionary idealism, which estranges revolutionaries because it is idealistic, and conservatives because it is revolutionary. It is a reevaluation of all values, which demonetizes the world's currency, and offers reward which the worldling does not want” (Inge, *Social Teaching* 47).

Having rejected the infallible authority of Church, Tradition, and Scripture, Inge elevates the role of Reason and Spirit, thus making the subjective turn, which as Roger Lundin notes, is the turn that eventually leads to the “Culture of Interpretation.” Church, Tradition, and Scripture constitute objective, external authorities, but Reason and Spirit are largely subjective and internal. Authority shifts from something external to the self to the internal self

itself. Given such a turn, it is only a matter of time before a pluralistic culture develops. “As long as poetry and the other arts could hold on to their separate, affective provinces of experience, science was free to rule over the larger kingdoms of knowledge” (Lundin 34). Reason, logically linked with Science, becomes distinct and completely separate from Faith. Experience and Reason led the Dean to the study of Eugenics as a practical and scientific solution to the problems of the day. Thus the Dean writes concerning the problems facing his own generation: “The war of the twentieth century is no longer between science and religion; it is between science and the irrational forces which make for social degeneracy and disintegration” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 232). As he stated elsewhere, “I believe that in science has come the chief revelation of the will and purposes of God that has been made to our generation” (qtd. in Stevens 282). This only makes sense in the context of Dean Inge’s Neoplatonic understanding of Christianity.

### *Inge’s Eugenics*

Dean Inge was among the earliest supporters of eugenics and one of the first representative supporters among the English clergy, though his position gained strength only in the first third of the twentieth century. As he noted of himself, he was an avid supporter of eugenics, admiring and cherishing his relationship with Sir Francis Galton, the coiner of the term. In his *Vale*, the closest work of autobiography Inge produced, he boasts that he served the Eugenics Society from its inception. He glories also in the status afforded him on the council since he was a member of the clergy (74-5). As Helm notes, “Inge

devoted more serious attention to what he called ‘the population question’ than to any other social problem” (228). Furthermore, Helm notes that Inge “saw no difficulty in reconciling his advocacy of eugenic principles with Christianity, in which, indeed, he thought such principles to be implicit” (228). He references Inge’s address, laced with eugenic themes, to Cambridge students, whose most important task is to make “better citizens and better Christians” “not through political revolution, but through moral, spiritual, and cultural reform” (Inge qtd. in Helm 228). By “better citizens” and “better Christians” Inge did not have in mind reforms in nurturing practices, but rather a revolution of nature. Hence his recognition of the difficulty of his position. In *The Church and the Age*, he writes:

Eugenists have a hard battle to fight against the indifference of politicians, the ignorance and prejudice of the public, and the determined hostility of the Roman Catholic Church. Sir Francis Galton used to say that eugenics ought to be a religion. It is a religion, and its name is Christianity. The Gospels contain the most uncompromising eugenic utterances. “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” “Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.” In this, as in several other matters, the new morality can appeal to the Founder of Christianity across long ages in which His followers have distorted His precepts or failed to understand them. (287)

In the preface to *The Church in the World*, Inge states that “A gardener has a right to weed his garden; and our national garden unfortunately contains a good many weeds which I should like to see torn up by the roots” (vii). The Dean further argues, in a collection of statements and short essays entitled *Wit and Wisdom*, that the science of eugenics is more ethical and more in keeping with the doctrines espoused in the Sermon on the Mount than the Christian principles

of the pre-scientific era. Furthermore, he openly suggests that society must put away the outdated principles found in the Decalogue for new ethics mandated by scientific inquiry (282). Indeed, Inge found it incredulous that not all Christians were avid supporters of eugenics, suggesting that Christianity had never concerned itself with the human environment but always with “saving the soul—their personality, the nature of man, not his environment” (*Vale* 76). Here the Dean clearly distorts orthodox Christianity which at its best has never been content to leave a man in his squalor, satisfied only to save his soul; while at the same time the suggestion that the saving of the soul implies a genetically superior race of people is clearly a modern (and false) invention. But as MacKenzie notes, “Eugenic ideas were put forward as a legitimation of the social position of the professional middle class, and as an argument for its enhancement. At the same time the eugenic programme was seen by its protagonists as a solution to the most pressing perceived problems of social control in British society” (501). Whereas Chesterton will state his presuppositions with an almost post-modern candor, Inge remains blind to the social and class lenses through which he attempts to determine the truth of things. He does not see, or at least does not admit, that his advocacy of eugenics is fueled by his own attempt at class self-preservation.

As noted earlier, the Dean saw racial decline and the population question as the two chief social problems of his time. To these problems he applied the new science of eugenics; but it is important to distinguish his support of eugenics from other kinds. His support of eugenics was not inherently racist as were the applied eugenics sponsored by American and German lawmakers; his eugenic

theories were more clearly influenced by class than race. This in fact was one of the chief differences between British eugenics and eugenics throughout Europe and in America in the first third of the twentieth century. Inge himself actually took great pains to separate himself from German eugenics that were racially based, especially after Hitler's rise to power. To his credit, he did see through the sham of racial theories that fueled some eugenic projects, while he appeared blind to similar projects fueled by an inherent classism. In one place he writes, "The official German doctrine of 'race' and 'blood' is the most grotesque piece of unscientific balderdash ever crammed down the throat of an intelligent people" (*Pacifist* 41). Such racial theories he labeled, as his own eugenics would be later labeled, pseudo-science (*Pacifist* 33). Elsewhere he emphatically states, "There are no pure races; and it happen that the nations which have done most in the world have been splendid mongrels, like the Greeks (Nordic and Mediterranean), the French and Germans (Nordic and Alpine), and the English" (*Pacifist* 33). Of course, it is a bit suspect that his own "race," though mongrel, is included as among the most accomplished in the world. He rejects German racism at the insistence that the German and English people, among others, have always been a superior breed of humanity.

Not far off the psychological mark, he calls Hitler's fixation on the Jews "insane" and saw that Hitler's *Lebensraum* was nothing more than love "for himself, for power and revenge" (*Pacifist* 184-5). And he quite clearly saw that the German practice of eugenics was nothing more than a racial pogrom. "Over against the noble Nordics stand the wholly alien Jews, who, we are told, contaminate the pure blood of the ruling race. They must therefore be got rid of,

and in the name of science they are being got rid of in no gentle fashion” (*Pacifist* 32, 42). This he says to condemn the Germanic practices. He even cites Scripture to reveal the foolishness of a belief in racial superiority; but he could not see that his classism was a piece with racism. At the same time, Inge understood that German racism was no different from American racism, only the object of scorn differed. “The German complains that the Poles, whom he considers an inferior race, breed like rabbits, while the gifted exponents of *Kultur* only bred like hares. The American is nervous about the numbers of the Negro [. . .]. Everywhere the tendency is for the superior stock to dwindle till it becomes a small aristocracy” (71). While Inge decries German eugenic practices that are fixated on race, he admits but does not see that his own fixation on a “superior stock” is similar if not identical.

While he does distance himself from the blatant racism of German and American policy, he is still concerned with the decline of the English people as a race. In particular, he is chiefly concerned with the proliferation of the poor and feeble-minded and the depletion of the aristocratic stocks. Concerning the English race generally, Inge believes that they are the better and the stronger for interbreeding (*Lay* 172). But the “professional classes,” under the weight of excessive taxation, is in danger of extinction. This troubles Inge because the professional aristocracy in particular “show longer, and usually much better pedigrees than the peerage; the persistence of marked ability in many of them, for several generations, is the delight of the eugenicist” (98-9). This “breed”—the upper classes of England—of humanity is among the best on earth. “Yet they have no prospects,” Inge laments, “except to be gradually harassed out of



existence, like the *curiales* of the later Roman Empire” (*Outspoken, First Series* 98-9). Only eugenics can prevent such a travesty.

The main facts to bear in mind are that restriction of numbers is inevitable; that our business is to find the least objectionable method of effecting it; that the world is filling up, and that the law of diminishing returns is asserting itself; and that (as regards this country) the abnormal expansion in the hundred years between the two Great Wars has definitely come to an end, since the advantage which we so long enjoyed of holding a privileged position in trade and commerce is ours no longer. *We have to cut our coat out of a somewhat smaller piece of cloth.* (Inge, *Christian Ethics* 282 italics added)

Not only is eugenics an abstract ideal, Inge argues; it also is a practical necessity.

In one particular treatise, Inge reproduces a table from Harold Cox’s study “The Problem of Population” in which he numerically demonstrates the declining birth rate among the more desirable classes and the increase among the poor and working classes. Most significant are the numbers at either end of the spectrum. In 1911 births per 1,000 among the upper and middle classes, Inge demonstrates, numbered 119, while the same ratio among the unskilled workmen numbered 213 (*Christian Ethics* 284-5). A frightening prospect for the student of statistics and eugenics!

But there is one not very small class which is even more prolific than the slum-dwellers; I mean the feeble-minded. It is difficult to exaggerate the ominousness of these figures. The State may for one or two generations be able to mask the national degeneration by tapping the hitherto underdeveloped abilities of the working-class. The level of ability in the professions may for a short time be maintained by recruiting them from the ablest sons of labourers; but the cumulative effect of such a drastic dysgenic selection as these figures indicate can only be the progressive deterioration of the British race. (Inge, *Christian Ethics* 285)

In the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes’s statement in *Buck v. Bell*, it is “better for all the world” that a eugenic solution be applied to the “progressive

deterioration of the British race.” The proliferation of the feeble-minded must be curbed.

Inge’s insistence on the superiority of the aristocracy is surprising because it contradicts so thoroughly his aversion to German racism; but his inability to see such is pervasive throughout his writing. He claims that there is no doubt that the children of the upper and middle classes are “intrinsically far better endowed than the children of unskilled labourers” (*Wit* 68). Furthermore, he suggests that three professions in particular yield the best endowed children: doctors, ministers, and teachers (*Wit* 68). It is no surprise that Inge was both a minister and professor, and that he found many friends among physicians. Yet he discerns no pretension in his position. “There is nothing snobbish in admitting the obvious fact that the children of those who have made good are likely, on the average, to be more useful citizens than the children of wastrels and misfits” (*More Lay* 46). This is the law of Nature.

A belief in the profound differences between the classes was not disconnected from his disdain for democracy, an important aside, since Chesterton ceaselessly praised this form of government in connection with his own position on eugenics. While Chesterton gloried in the common man, Inge suggested that democracy is best suited for disintegration and destruction. As he put it, “Democracy dissolves communities into individuals and collects them again into mobs” (*Wit* 71). Perhaps most tellingly he states in *Labels and Libels*, “The greatest danger which we have to fear is the result of universal suffrage” (144). Democracy gives us cause to fear because “[t]here is absolutely no guarantee in the nature of things that the decision of the majority will be either

wise or just; and what is neither wise nor just ought not to be done” (Inge, *The Church and the Age* 15-16). Thus did he confess at the end of his life, “I do not love the human race. I have loved just a few of them. The rest are a pretty mixed lot” (“*De Senectute*”).

Inge’s friend Margaret Sanger spells out the exact connection between contempt for the common man and exaltation of eugenics, between democracy as a form of government and the elimination of the feeble-minded, between the disdain of the human race and the promotion of birth control. The math is quite rudimentary when everyone is given a vote, and the least desirable members of society are the most numerous and the most proficient at their own propagation; it is no surprise then that “The Congressional Record mirrors our political imbecility” (*Pivot* 178). This according to Inge is one of the chief problems in America. “[T]he classical land of democracy, is governed by voters about half of whom are, in intelligence, children of less than thirteen years old” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 269). Democracy to Inge “seemed, on close inspection, to depend on the notion of biological equality” and was to be rejected “because the necessary condition of biological uniformity was not realizable, despite the popular turned towards socialism and egalitarianism” (McGregor 304). As Edwin Black makes clear, eugenics was the position held by “the nation’s elite thinkers and many of its most progressive reformers.” Almost every imaginable social movement at that time was thus “cross-infected” with eugenics (125).

Despite the rise of socialism and workers’ movements, the Eugenics position was the educated position of the Western World during the first third of the twentieth century. Inge thus suggests that humans ought to be bred in a

manner no different from the animals. “When racing men and dog fanciers begin to disregard pedigrees, it will be time to discard eugenics and proclaim with the Irishman that one man is as good as another, ‘and better, too.’ But birth without works, like faith without works, is dead” (*Pacifist* 134). At the same time, he laments the triumph of the canaille: “We must face a progressive deterioration in the quality of our people if we encourage those who are at the bottom of the social ladder to multiply at the expense of those who are able to pay their way as useful citizens” (*End of an Age* 243). In the end, he hopefully suggests that countries with high birth rates, among the poor of course, ought to be able to eliminate their “unfit”:

[I]t is impossible for a country to have at any time a much larger population than it can support [. . .]. The supposed duty of multiplication, and the alleged right to expand, are among the chief causes of modern war; and I repeat that if they justify war, it must be a war of extermination, since mere conquest does nothing to solve the problem. (*Lay* 184-5)

This idea Margaret Sanger employs with eugenic fervor to negative eugenics, quoting the former statement in her autobiography (377-78). Of particular interest to Inge, Sanger, and all eugenics supporters were the feeble-minded. Writing in a piece entitled “Eugenics,” the Dean states, “Feeble-mindedness follows simple Mendelian rules. It cannot be bred out of a family in which it has established itself, but it could be eliminated by bringing the infected stock to an end” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 258). Furthermore, he mentions that the Eugenics Education Society “actively supported the Act for the compulsory segregation of mental defectives” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 258). Finally, he writes that even though transmission of intelligence remains a mystery, “we do

know the only way in which they may be eliminated. [. . .] Persons with a definite transmissible taint ought not to be allowed to procreate” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 260, 271). G. K. Chesterton, in contrast, argued vehemently against such actions against the feebleminded.

### *Positive Versus Negative Eugenics*

The eugenic options were as follows: sterilization, segregation, selective breeding, and birth control. These essentially divide into what are called positive and negative eugenics. Negative eugenics included sterilization and segregation, while positive eugenics included selective breeding among fitter families and birth control among the unfit. Inge could not envision negative eugenics taking hold in England, though it was successfully being practiced in America and on the European continent. In fact, he suggests that negative eugenics was often times racially motivated (*End* 285-6). However, he feared that positive eugenics was toothless. The “elimination of the unfit is more practicable at present than eugenic attempts to breed supermen” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 248). So far from creating supermen, “we are breeding not vigorous barbarians but a new type of sub-men, abhorred by nature, and ugly as no natural product is ugly” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 266).

Inge and the eugenicists desired to improve the human race, suggesting two possible goals. “The first will bid us aim at the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The second will rather seek to make mankind as perfect as it is capable of becoming” (*More Lay* 283). He recognized the inherent Nietzschean philosophy at work in his choice of the latter. “Of course, this leaves open the

question which Nietzsche raised with such scorn and fury,” Inge asks, “whether we ought not to aim at the perfection of the elite, at the cost of sacrificing the mass who are incapable of being elevated” (*More Lay* 284). And since we have already seen his disdain for democracy and his praise of the aristocracy we can read right through the sham of his answer. “I think the wise eugenicist will aim at raising the intrinsic quality of the whole population, whether or not it may seem desirable to segregate an AI class by more careful selection” (*More Lay* 284). Inge has already made exceedingly clear his fears concerning the proliferation of the poor and feeble-minded and his disdain for them as humans.

Such a goal—the perfection of the human race—given the proliferation of the poor and the negligence of production among the upper classes, creates a dilemma for the eugenicist. “Deleterious variations are far more common in nature than beneficial ones. Natural selection weeds them out; now that humanitarianism protects them, some form of rational selection is surely necessary” (Inge, *Pacifist* 285). Not every human is a desirable breeder, and the least desirable are the most proficient at breeding. It is important to note the essential vagueness of Inge’s description. “There are of course many other diseases and defects which may make a man or woman an undesirable parent” (*Pacifist* 285). Without further description, the interpreter can make distinctions only based on previous class and economic status distinctions. Inge astutely recognizes both the complexity of the issue—he is after all a student of the science that will become the study of genetics—and the role that the State will be required to play in the elimination of the undesirable population. “[R]eversion to a lower type is inevitable,” Inge argues. “The State of the future will have to step in to

prevent the propagation of undesirable variations, whether physical or mental, and will doubtless find means to encourage the increase of families that are well endowed by Nature” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 78). Furthermore, though he admits the complexity of the issue and the danger of forging ahead with an infantile science, he writes:

We know that much mental defect, disease, vice and crime, might be prevented if obviously undesirable parents could be prevented from adding to the population. [. . .] Perhaps we are not all agreed on what qualities we should choose to breed for in our eugenic State; but there can be no difference of opinion as to the kind of people whom we do not want. (*Vale* 77)

The State, and not just the eugenicist or clergyman, has a role to play in eugenics because “when the State takes upon itself the burden of providing for all the defectives that are born, it is entirely within its rights in insisting that the number of these *worse than useless* mouths shall not be wantonly increased” (italics added) (Inge, *Outspoken*, Second Series 271).

In another argument on the same subject, Inge writes, “For the first time in history we are trying to extend the best gifts of civilization to the whole nation instead of confining them to a privileged class” (*Vale* 87). An altruistic man indeed! But how does the eugenicist proceed to eliminate undesirable breeders from the breeding population? Not only does Inge suggest that “it is impossible to segregate degenerates” in England, but he also finds the subject of sterilization personally “distasteful” and sees that the probable outcome of marriage restrictions will be more children born out of wedlock (*End* 285-6). Herein we find another inherent contradiction in Inge’s position and the underlying classism that pervades it. And while Inge says that he finds the subject of

sterilization “distasteful,” it does not preclude him from advocating it. He urges the British to catch up with American willingness “to listen to the advice of science” (*More Lay* 280).

Eugenics there is almost a part of their religion. [. . .] However discouraging the immediate prospect [of sterilization] may be in a land of incorrigible sentimentalists like England, it is the manifest duty of those who understand the supreme importance of preventing the degradation of the national type, to go on attempting to educate their fellow-countrymen. (*More Lay* 280)

So while on the one hand he is repulsed by sterilization, he considers it necessary to the health of the race.

*Eugenics, Birth Control, Euthanasia, Suicide, and Capital Punishment*

Even though he supports eugenics, Inge does not support abortion nor infanticide; but he does advocate birth control, capital punishment, suicide, and euthanasia, all the while condemning humanitarianism. “The new morality,” Inge writes, “will have nothing to do with the old saying: ‘Where God sends mouths, He sends meat.’ We cannot throw on the Deity the responsibility for bringing unwanted children into the world, and leaving them to the State to clothe, feed, and support by outdoor relief” (*More Lay* 280). Necessarily then, the number of births in a given country must be controlled. The obvious danger of birth control is that it eliminates the risk of pregnancy from the sexual act so that promiscuity might flourish, but the unobvious danger of birth control is that the desirable classes—those most likely to willingly use methods of scientific birth control—might actually begin to decrease, reversing the desirable effects (Helm 260-4). Furthermore, “There is also some danger that the movement [birth



control] may go too far. It operates very dysgenically, for the only high birth-rates now are among the slum dwellers and the feeble-minded” (Inge, *Vale* 82).

At the same time, Inge became an outspoken advocate of birth control for eugenic reasons. “The command, ‘Be fruitful and multiply,’ which is said to have been issued when the world contained only two human beings, is inapplicable,” Inge argues, “now that it has to support nearly two thousand millions” (*Vale* 80). Not only does Inge support birth control, but he finds pleasure in being the “first clergyman to face obloquy by urging that the question ought to be discussed as freely as any other social and economic problem” (*Vale* 81). He believes it is the duty of the “good citizen” to restrict the number of children that he produces “[i]f he has reason to think that his children are not likely to be healthy in body or mind, or if it is plain that there is no longer room for large families in the class or the nation to which he belongs” (*More Lay* 280-81). As Sanger argues, “Birth control is the pivot around which every movement must swing making for race betterment” (*Debate* 54).

The relationship between the two figures is an interesting one. Sanger fully exploits the Dean’s willingness to publicly advocate eugenics and birth control, listing him in the footnote among the “most clear thinking and far seeing of the Eugenists” who have accepted Birth Control “as the most constructive and necessary of the means to racial health” (*Autobiography* 189). In her *Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger explicitly references him and his position: “In an address delivered before the Eugenics Education Society of London,[4] William Ralph Inge, the Very Reverend Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, pointed out that the doctrine of Birth Control was to be interpreted as of the very essence of

Christianity” (201). Furthermore she writes that “Dean Inge effectively answers those who have objected to the methods of Birth Control as ‘immoral’ and in contradiction and inimical to the teachings of Christ. [. . .] Dean Inge believes Birth Control is an essential part of Eugenics, and an essential part of Christian morality” (*Pivot* 202-3). Finally, she adds, “The attitude of the more intelligent and enlightened clergy has been well and succinctly expressed by Dean Inge, who, referring to the ethics of Birth Control, writes: *‘This is emphatically a matter in which every man and woman must judge for themselves, and must refrain from judging others’*” (*Pivot* 206).

Yet the relationship was not one-sided, and Dean Inge did not seem to mind the exploitation. Inge and Sanger together advocated eugenics and birth control as an “essential part of Eugenics.” Richard Soloway has interestingly shown that the science of birth control was at the same time fueled by eugenic theory even in its production. “The control of human evolution and the biological betterment of society had been persuasive elements in the search for a cheap, effective contraceptive as an antidote to the scourge of poverty and dysgenic, differential breeding” (Soloway 659). Persons of influence encouraged the use of birth control for eugenic reasons, and scientists worked feverishly to develop an inexpensive means of birth prevention for the same eugenic reasons.

On the one hand, Inge recognizes that birth control might provide a license for licentiousness, but on the other hand he cannot imagine the State of the future without it. Similarly one wonders whether he would have eventually developed a similar position concerning abortion. Inge clearly decries the practice of abortion and takes painstaking care to distance himself from the

practice of infanticide (although it is telling that he sees the logical connection between eugenics and abortion and infanticide). He attributes the large number of abortions in America to the illegalization of birth control devices and denounces “the destruction of life that has already begun” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 74). In *Our Present Discontents*, he definitively states, “The life of the new individual begins as soon as the ovum is fertilized. There is no point of time at which foeticide first begins to be murder” (207). However, science has now questioned the truth of this: no doubt Inge would now share the same doubt.

Concerning the legalization of abortion, Inge writes:

I cannot agree with those who would like frankly to legalize the practice, on the ground that the parents have a right to decide whether they wish to have a child or not. To destroy a life that has already begun is a serious matter, and to allow abortion might seem logically to justify infanticide. The sanctity of human life has already been seriously impaired by wars and revolutions; we do not want to see this unhappy tendency further extended. (*Our Present* 208)

Surely, we are to read the “sanctity of human life” according to the standards set forth elsewhere. It is ironic that Inge would state, “Anything that diminishes our sense of the sacredness of human life is so far an evil” when so much of his energy was devoted to preventing the proliferation of certain kinds of human lives that he obviously did not value (*Our Present* 209). Surely his thinking would have caught up to the scientific community in dismissing such archaic and unscientific notions had he lived longer.

This conjecture is due in part to the positions that he developed concerning capital punishment and euthanasia. Again, it is worth noting that the Dean took great pride in his trend-leading positions: “In my attitude towards

birth-control, euthanasia, and other test-questions, I am, with some reservations, on the side of the new morality against the old” (*Vale* 93). Whatever the reservations, they did not prevent him from outspoken positions on the matters. He stated with absolute clarity that he did not object “to capital punishment, which I should like to see deprived of its humiliating accessories and then extended to all incorrigibly anti-social offenders” (*Vale* 99). In fact, he supports capital punishment, and not just for capital offences, for eugenic reasons. “The State has as good a right to remove an incorrigible public enemy as a gardener has to pull up weeds in his garden,” Inge writes. “The old argument that the Book of Genesis sanctions the execution of murderers but of no others is absurd on several grounds” (*Pacifist* 238). He goes on to explain that the Old Testament proscribed death for such crimes as adultery and breaking the Sabbath. According to Inge any number of crimes might qualify for capital punishment, for the goal “ought to be simply the removal of a public nuisance” (*Pacifist* 238). Furthermore, he suggests that the penalty ought to be imposed “privately, in a lethal chamber, or an electric chair as in America, and without any unnecessary humiliation. The condemned man should be encouraged to carry out the sentence on himself” (*Pacifist* 238). “The State of the future,” he hopes, “will kill mercifully but freely” (*Church and the Age* 18-19). Additionally, as Helm notes, Inge believed that suicide is also permissible in order to end painful suffering (273-74). Inge himself writes:

The civilised world will no doubt come to the conclusion that so far as the State is concerned a man has a right to declare his innings closed whenever he chooses, and that though the occasions are few indeed when a brave and good man, in possession of his faculties, will choose this way of escape, there are exceptional cases when no

obstacle should be put in the way of anticipating an inevitable and cruel end of an incurable and painful disease. (*End of an Age* 216)

Perhaps, he did not foresee physician-assisted suicides, but he clearly advocates a position in favor of capital punishment, suicide, and euthanasia; and while he sees the connection between abortion and infanticide, he ignores the connection between euthanasia and genocide.

Furthermore, his position on eugenics leads him to the repudiation of humanitarian efforts, especially the effort to abolish capital punishment, although he praises the “humanitarian” efforts applied to the treatment of animals (Helm 260-4). In providing a portrait of the Dean, Dark also challenges Inge’s disdain for humanitarianism.

[I]f the Dean seriously considers that society is misguided in providing hospitals for the diseased and in keeping alive the physically imperfect, then he must obviously favour the lethal chamber for the rotten material which he resents, and which, judging from the wealth of his invective, would be extended far beyond those who are physically maimed to those who in the Dean’s view are mentally and morally twisted, among whom the majority of the members of the Labour party would most certainly be counted. (230)

Dark’s analysis is not far off the mark. Humanitarian efforts from the Dean’s point of view simply keep alive the undesirable members of society, promoting the “reckless multiplication among the refuse” (*Outspoken*, Second Series 78). As he puts it, “only those who have studied the subject know what misery, and what racial deterioration, are caused by allowing *laissez faire* and ignorant humanitarianism to go on unchecked” (*Vale* 76). In a word, humanitarian efforts are dysgenic; they are bad for the race; more specifically, they are bad for the rich.

Margaret Sanger actually employs Inge's arguments against humanitarian relief to bolster her own.

Such philanthropy, as Dean Inge has so unanswerably pointed out, is kind only to be cruel, and unwittingly promotes precisely the results most deprecated. It encourages the healthier and more normal sections of the world to shoulder the burden of unthinking and indiscriminate fecundity of others; which brings with it, as I think the reader must agree, a dead weight of human waste. Instead of decreasing and aiming to eliminate the stocks that are most detrimental to the future of the race and the world, it tends to render them to a menacing degree dominant. (*Pivot* 116-17)

Humanitarian relief efforts simply promote “the perpetuation of defectives, delinquents and dependents. These are the most dangerous elements in the world community, the most devastating curse on human progress and expression,” according to Sanger (*Pivot* 123).

Given Dean Inge's eugenic outlook, it should come as no surprise that he also strongly opposed interracial marriages on eugenic grounds. “The general opinion is that while the eugenicist would look with approval on the marriage of an Englishman and an Italian, or a German and a Jew, the mixture of two very different racial types, such as the European and the negro, Mongolian, or aboriginal Australian, should not be encouraged” (*Pacifist* 225-6). The fear of miscegenation was not his alone but a common one at the time. No one could reasonably argue that the child of parents of mixed lineage was genetically inferior to his or her parents; what they did argue however was that over time this weakened both genetic stocks. Therefore, the gloomy dean ends with a shiny utopian vision of the future:

The optimum population of Great Britain has been fixed at twenty million. This is far from saturation point; but several other considerations besides the food supply have been thought of, and it

has been decided that the people shall not live in crowds. The majority live in villages and small towns; there are no very large cities except London.

No persons are allowed to marry and have children without certificates of bodily and mental fitness. But since inheritable bodily and mental defects have been almost eradicated, and since there is no recklessly breeding submerged class, very little interference with personal liberty is necessary. The tendency is for the population to remain almost stationary, for large families are neither approved nor desired.

Mental and physical tests are a part of school and university training. These, and family histories, are registered, and an AI husband or wife is as much sought after as wealth and titles are now. Physical perfection is cultivated, and a rational costume enables beauty to be recognized in the body and limbs as well as in the face.

Crime is very rare, and is never punished by imprisonment. There are reformatories for first offenders, and incorrigibly anti-social persons are privately and painlessly extinguished, without humiliation to their families.

Well, that is my dream of a possible future. I am no disbeliever in progress, but I very heartily disbelieve in a law of progress. A religious writer said, 'Ye are as holy as ye truly wish to be holy.' In the same way, we can be as civilized as we truly wish to be civilized. (*Rustic* 245-249)

The Dean's utopian and eugenic vision all but denied the earthy doctrine of the Incarnation upon which Chesterton built his stance against Eugenics to which we now turn.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Chesterton's Attack on the Proposal to Eliminate the Feeble-Minded

#### *Eugenics and Other Evils*

The Chesterton-Inge dialogue centered around a piece of legislation that came before Parliament in 1912 entitled the Mental Deficiency Act. In *The Problem of Mental Deficiency*, Matthew Thomson asserts that the changes that were made in the successful 1913 version of the Mental Deficiency Bill, from the unsuccessful 1912 version were “largely superficial” (38-9). This claim belies the fact that a rather fierce dialogue and debate surrounded the passage of the act, and it underestimates the rhetorical advances Chesterton made in the eugenics conversation in the years leading up to World War I. Thomson is concerned with Mental Deficiency history and social policy, not eugenics per se: an important distinction for our purposes because we are not concerned with mental deficiency per se but with the role that eugenics played in the Parliamentary debates surrounding the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913. While it may be argued that the changes were largely superficial, it is significant that the language of eugenics was deleted from the bill that finally did pass. Russell Sparkes gives all of the credit to Chesterton claiming that he was the lone “public figure [who] waged a vigorous, and ultimately successful, campaign against the proposed Mental Deficiency Bill in 1912” (118). This is not altogether true, for Josiah Wedgwood, an Independent Member of Parliament, was also influential in the actual debates before



Parliament (Alton, “Chesterton”).<sup>1</sup> However, Chesterton was clearly in the minority, and the final Bill, much to his credit, was void of Eugenic language, and the definition of feeble-mindedness was modified accordingly (Simmons 398-9).

If not entirely alone, Chesterton’s voice was certainly a lonely voice, swimming courageously against the moral and religious currents of his own day in his denunciation of eugenics and state-sponsored eugenic practices. Writing about the eugenics movement in *Eugenics and Other Evils*, a collection of newspaper articles edited and collected and republished in 1922, Chesterton decries Eugenics as an evil thing. He asserts:

But Eugenics itself does exist for those who have sense enough to see that ideas exist; and Eugenics itself, in large quantities or small, coming quickly or coming slowly, urged from good motives or bad, applied to a thousand people or applied to three, Eugenics itself is a thing not more to be bargained about than poisoning. (14)

Even so, he rather charitably writes that he will engage the Eugenicists “not by the evil which they actually do” but “by the good they think they are doing” (14). Thus, at the very outset of his argument, Chesterton acknowledges that his is not an isolated voice but one party in an ongoing dialogue. His contribution, far from being monological, acknowledges and charitably engages the “other.”

Chesterton’s tone is an important aspect of the dialogue and bears brief treatment here. While he does suggest that the Dean had “dark but sincere motives” in being both Dean and gloomy, Chesterton usually avoids personal attacks and actually praises the rhetoric and intelligence of the Dean (*Miscellany*

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<sup>1</sup>Of course, as Harvey G. Simmons points out, “The 1913 Act did not solve the social problem of feeble-mindedness. One of the reasons, of course, was that policymakers were really trying to solve other social problems such as poverty, crime and illegitimacy by reducing the numbers of feeble-minded people. When it became apparent that the linkages were not as close as previously thought, then some of the impetus behind the initial policy diminished” (400).

62). As he states in *The Thing*, “NONE of us I hope ever wished to be unjust to Dean Inge.” In fact, he quite agreed, not surprisingly, with Inge on the subject of the prohibition of alcohol (“The Prohibition Problem” 127). As James Schall notes, “[O]f those whom he criticized or opposed in print, his main profession, he always treated them fairly and with that courtesy that he praised so much from the Middle Ages” (591). Furthermore, Chesterton opens the discourse, albeit tongue in cheek, stating that “Dr. Inge has as much right to his heresy as anybody else” (*Miscellany* 62). The conversation is open though not open-ended. Chesterton shows a remarkable willingness to engage the Dean rather than to silence him. At the same time, Chesterton argues that “Everybody would be better and happier if Dean Inge were known as Professor Inge,” a hope that even the Dean himself might have entertained (*Thing*).

Concerning the question of dialogue, it is interesting to note one of Chesterton’s newspaper articles on Eugenics about the nature of the argument surrounding the subject:

These disputants have learned so long and so elaborately that there are a certain number of arguments on each side that they cannot deal with any new argument at all. They know the correct move in answer to the correct gambit; they know the orthodox parry to the orthodox lunge: but if anyone opens attack along another line, they still make use of the old move or parry, though it is checking nothing and parrying nothing. (“Two Sides” 96)

In other words, it is Chesterton who offers this dialogical way of thinking to the conversation, recognizing its utter necessity for genuine discussion.

Furthermore, he recognizes that such a conversation can occur only when both parties recognize the “sacredness” of the word offered by both parties. He continues:

We shall not advance an inch in any of the arguments of today till people can be induced to see that word can only be used as a spell, or even as a curse, so long as we keep it sacred. The party wall will not keep your neighbour out of your garden unless it keeps you out of your neighbour's garden. If you undermine it for your own purposes you undermine it quite as much for his. ("Failure" 448)

This comes exceedingly close to a dialogical confession. As Bakhtin writes, "All language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language" (12). It seems by this confession that Chesterton is aware of the polyglot nature of the conversation though he uses different terms to make his point. Thus does Chesterton maintain that his own argumentative word can be understood only in the presence of other argumentative words.

### *Eugenics and Euphemisms*

Chesterton begins by attempting to define the unruly, sham science, as he labeled it, of eugenics, acknowledging the various strands and strains of eugenics that exist but not without immediately pointing to a fundamental problem with the scientific endeavor. "I know that it means very different things to different people; but that is only because evil always takes advantage of ambiguity" (*Eugenics* 13). The fact that he must at the outset define his terms suggests firstly an honest engagement with the issue. By so doing, he sets the boundaries of the discussion. To say that he is talking about one thing and not another is both to civilize the discussion but also to legitimize the other voice in the conversation. Secondly, and more importantly the necessity of defining eugenics at the outset suggests the danger, in Chesterton's view, of advocating something that is inherently ambiguous. If it is hard to condemn an idea because it can always be redefined to suit the audience or purpose of the rhetorician, then it should be

equally difficult to advocate the same idea. Such is the case of eugenics. Canovan illustrates the essential danger of this ambiguity. “[I]t must entail putting power over domestic life into the hands of a few, while the sheer vagueness of notions about eugenic ‘fitness’ or otherwise would make the exercise of this power utterly arbitrary” (69). Ambiguous policy and arbitrary power are inextricably linked. Chesterton reveals an inherent weakness of the science before he even defines it—the fact that eugenics can be defined in so many different ways should make its proponents wary of supporting it.

Additionally, Chesterton sees a further weakness in the rhetoric of the Eugenicians, who delight in euphemisms and the passive voice. The following passage is utterly Chestertonian:

Most Eugenists are Euphemists. I mean merely that short words startle them, while long words soothe them. And they are utterly incapable of translating the one into the other, however obviously they mean the same thing. Say to them “The persuasive and even coercive powers of the citizen should enable him to make sure that the burden of longevity in the previous generations does not become disproportionate and intolerable, especially to the females”; say this to them and they sway slightly to and fro like babies sent to sleep in cradles. Say to them “Murder your mother,” and they sit up quite suddenly. Yet the two sentences, in cold logic, are exactly the same. (*Eugenics* 19-20)

Dean Inge insisted that he knew the people he did not want. What he did not say was that he did not want any more poor, nor did he want anyone less mentally capable than himself or the members of his class. Such use of language is not limited to Eugenics alone but is the result of a greater cultural crisis, Chesterton asserts. “The mark of the atheistic style is that it instinctively chooses the word which suggests that things are dead things; that things have no souls. Thus they will not speak of waging war, which means willing it; they speak of the “outbreak

of war," as if all the guns blew up without the men touching them" (*Eugenics* 40). Similar to George Orwell's proclamation in "Politics and the English Language," Chesterton deplores indirect speech and sees its danger when applied to Science and to the State. As Chesterton elsewhere puts it, the Eugenacists "are incapable of connected thought" ("Two Points" 462). For words and thoughts, thinking and writing, are morally linked.

The Eugenists resort not only to polysyllabism but also avoid the active voice. The Eugenists, Chesterton argues, eagerly employ the passive voice, since they are "as passive in their statements as they are active in their experiments. Their sentences always enter tail first, and have no subject, like animals without heads. It is never 'the doctor should cut off this leg' or 'the policeman should collar that man.' It is always 'Such limbs should be amputated,' or 'Such men should be under restraint'" (*Eugenics* 41). These weaknesses in the rhetoric of the Eugenists allow ambiguity to flourish, and such flaccid rhetoric belies the weakness of Eugenics itself. Were they to say directly and actively what they mean, Chesterton argues, the illogic of their immoral arguments would be exposed.

### *Eugenics Defined*

Even though vagueness seems to surround Eugenics, Chesterton himself does not find it problematic to define. He divides the so-called science into a "moral basis," which he finds consistently wherever Eugenics is proclaimed, and "social application[s]" which vary from supporter to supporter. "Now the Eugenic moral basis is this; that the baby for whom we are primarily and directly

responsible is the babe unborn. That is, that we know (or may come to know) enough of certain inevitable tendencies in biology to consider the fruit of some contemplated union in that direct and clear light of conscience which we can now only fix on the other partner in that union” (*Eugenics* 14). Of course, the social application of eugenics is more broadly defined as the so-called scientific improvement of the human race, through both positive and negative means as discussed in chapter two; but Chesterton pierces what he perceives to be the nonsense of “the scientific development of the human race” to show that the (im)morality of eugenics is that it concentrates on future possibilities rather than present realities. He uses the social application of Eugenics to reveal the folly of its moral basis. As he aphoristically declares, “The point here is that a new school believes Eugenics against Ethics. And it is proved by one familiar fact: that the heroisms of history are actually the crimes of Eugenics” (*Eugenics* 15).<sup>2</sup>

Pius XI in his encyclical letter *Casti Connubi* proceeds to outline a position eerily similar to Chesterton’s. Eugenic practices are pernicious because they put their faith in an unknown future unknown to the detriment of presently reality. “Finally, that pernicious practice must be condemned which closely touches upon the natural right of man to enter matrimony but affects also in a real way the welfare of the offspring” (Pius 68). Furthermore, Pius notes that these eugenic measures are taken “not to prevent future crimes by guilty persons, but against every right and good they wish the civil authority to arrogate to itself a power over a faculty which it never had and can never legitimately possess”—namely,

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<sup>2</sup>Chesterton refers to the many historical examples of genius from “questionable” parentage.

the “faculty” of child-bearing (68). As Chesterton reiterates, “The act of founding the family, I repeat, was an individual adventure outside the frontiers of the State. [. . .] The shortest general definition of Eugenics on its practical side is that it does, in a more or less degree, propose to control some families at least as if they were families of pagan slaves” (*Eugenics* 18).

The marriage of two people regardless of their physical or mental health has always, Chesterton argues, been a privately controlled action: “the founding of a family is the personal adventure of a free man” (*Eugenics* 17). In other words, Chesterton succinctly defines Eugenics as “the control of some men over the marriage and unmarried of others; and probably means the control of the few over the marriage and unmarried of the many” (*Eugenics* 19). In the name of a state that has arrogated the most fundamental power to itself, the very basis of equality and democracy is thus denied. Again, Chesterton anticipates what Pope Pius XI will declare in *Casti Connubi*. The so-called science of eugenics determines not only who could marry whom but also who might be fit to produce the human future. This the Pope will condemn as a clear violation of human liberty, suggesting that the “free consent” of the married persons is “necessary to constitute true marriage” (6). Eugenic propositions, then, as Chesterton argues before the Pope declares, severely inhibits that most sacred human dignity and right, the inviolable human conscience.

In addition to outlining the dangers of ambiguity, Chesterton demonstrates that eugenics is fundamentally opposed to the British tradition. Support of eugenics requires relinquishing long-held views about the relationship between the individual and the State, between the few and the many. According

to eugenics, the State is given the determining vote in the propagation of the species. Rather than concerning itself with the stability and fidelity of marriages, the Eugenic State concerns itself with heredity (*Eugenics* 16). He quite wittily compares this concern to certain modern trends in medicine, “This is the fundamental fallacy in the whole business of preventive medicine. Prevention is not better than cure. Cutting off a man's head is not better than curing his headache; it is not even better than failing to cure it” (*Eugenics* 45).

The compulsory medical health of its citizens does not fall under the purview of the state. As Chesterton writes, “If a man's personal health is a public concern, his most private acts are *more* public than his most public acts. [. . .] The policeman must be in a new sense a private detective; and shadow him in private affairs rather than in public affairs” (*Eugenics* 103). In other words, this doctrine of Eugenics leads to an absolute confusion of the private and the public spheres of life. For the Eugenic State to control its descendents, it must necessarily control marriages and the marriage bed. Again Chesterton anticipates what the Pope will declare in his encyclical.

Public magistrates have no direct power over the bodies of their subjects; therefore, where no crime has taken place and there is no cause present for grave punishment, they can never directly harm, or tamper with the integrity of the body, either for the reasons of eugenics or for any other reason. (*Eugenics* 70)

Such a declaration is not dialogical in form, nor is it intended to be such; but the link between Chesterton and *Casti Connubi* is clear: both see that when the State involves itself with the bodies of its citizens it has severely transgressed its appointed boundaries. To sum, Chesterton opposes Eugenics because of its essential vagueness, its rhetorical weaknesses, and the dubiety of its attempt to



manage the human future. As he states in his 26 March 1910 installment of the *Illustrated London News*, “The proposal to produce the best human beings scientifically is one that is open to an interminable list of objections, of which the first (and perhaps not the least important) is that it cannot be done” (“Socialist Morality” 500).

### *The Feeble-minded*

The primary subjects of the Mental Deficiency Act of 1912/13 were the so-called feeble-minded. The term originated from a member of the Council of the Charity Organization Society to indicate “improvable idiots” (Simmons 388). By 1912, the term was employed comprehensively to indicate both moral and mental degeneracy (Sparkes 120). Thus Chesterton appropriately nicknamed the bill “The Feeble-Minded Bill.” This Bill, he argued, was nothing other than a piece of eugenic legislation. “This first Eugenic Law clears the ground and may be said to proclaim negative Eugenics; but it cannot be defended, and nobody has attempted to defend it, except on the Eugenic theory” (*Eugenics* 25). In other words, the merits of the Bill rested on the so-called science of Eugenics and nothing else; the Bill did not possess its own merits apart from the theory that Chesterton dismantles. So he finds it necessary to rename the Bill by calling attention to what he says it really is by avoiding euphemistic language. “I will call it the Feeble-Minded Bill, both for brevity and because the description is strictly accurate. It is, and quite simply and literally, a Bill for incarcerating as madmen those whom no doctor will consent to call mad. It is enough if some doctor or other may happen to call them weak-minded” (*Eugenics* 25). The vagueness here

was especially problematic. As the author signed as A.E.R. in a *New Age* article expresses it, “[I]f we are to be scientific, we must know what feeble-mindedness really is; definition is the very condition of the precise thinking that real science demands” (91). But this sort of precision was consistently absent in the Eugenics discourse. Perhaps there was something of Chesterton’s biography wrapped up in all of this. One will recall that doctors declared the young Chesterton either an idiot or a genius when his parents complained about his lagging development as a child. At any rate, Chesterton recognized that fuzzy definitions create sharp results. As he states, “We can only observe, with a moderation almost amounting to weakness, ‘You seem to be the sort of person who will do this sort of thing.’ And then we can lock him up. The principle of the indeterminate sentence is the creation of the indeterminate mind” (*Eugenics* 34). Again, the implicit fear is that ambiguous policy will lead to arbitrary power.

But if the State is willing to segregate, or worse still sterilize, people because of their allegedly inadequate mental capacity, then it must also be willing to deny their more fundamental right to exist (Chesterton, *Eugenics* 35). Weakness of mind is in the mind of the beholder. The doctor becomes nothing more than an agent of the state with enormous discretionary powers; and as Chesterton quips, turnabout is fair play. “But if he merely thinks my mind is weak, I may happen to think the same of his. I often do” (*Eugenics* 37). But his real concerns were not with the doctors who judged mental capacity but the classes who were affected by eugenics propositions and those proposing them (Canovan 70). Additionally, Chesterton argues that the “strong-minded” ought to be the ones incarcerated for they have made a “hell” of many more families than

the number of feeble-minded who have had a detrimental effect on their own progeny. Hence his brilliant rhetorical retort:

But since free-will is believed by Eugenists no more than by Calvinists, since front-doors are respected by Eugenists no more than by house-breakers, and since the Habeas Corpus is about as sacred to Eugenists as it would be to King John, why do not *they* bring light and peace into so many human homes by removing a demoniac from each of them? (*Eugenics* 43-4)

In rejecting feeble-mindedness as a category he is not rejecting insanity or even idiocy categorically, or even the necessity of a clearly defined additional category; these terms have commonly agreed upon definitions and displays, and those labeled as such have always had restrictions placed upon them; “but feeble-mindedness is a new phrase under which you might segregate anybody” (*Eugenics* 49). The feeble-minded were also called the Unfit, a term that Chesterton equally rejected on similar grounds. Chesterton asked, Unfit for what? (*Avowals* 54).

Further, Chesterton admits to knowing certain persons who could be called feeble-minded but not idiotic or insane. He thus objects the vagueness and imprecision of the term because it might allow anyone to be classified as feeble-minded with horrible personal and political consequence. “My point is that if I want to dispossess a nephew, oust a rival, silence a blackmailer, or get rid of an importunate widow, there is nothing in logic to prevent my calling them feeble-minded too. And the vaguer the charge is the less they will be able to disprove it” (*Eugenics* 50). This he compares to witch hunts. “Yet we know that the thing degenerated into a rabid and despicable persecution of the feeble or the old. It ended by being a war upon the weak. It ended by being what Eugenics

begins by being” (*Eugenics* 51). Eugenics does nothing more than provide scientific prowess to such a war against the weak—whomever the powerful deem weak. In this case, the weak are the poor, and the poor always had a special hold on Chesterton. Writing in *The Victorian Age of Literature*, he states, “the poor are always at the tail of the procession, and that whether they are morally worse or better depends on whether humanity as a whole is proceeding towards heaven or hell. When humanity is going to hell, the poor are always nearest to heaven” (455). By virtue of their poverty the poor are less likely to be deluded by such convenient immoralities as Eugenics.

Related to the category of the feebleminded is the theme of sanity that runs throughout Chesterton’s work. In truth, he writes, “the madman is not the man who defies the world; he is the man who denies it” (*Eugenics* 32). And this is what the Eugenicist does; he denies existence to entire classes of individuals. Turning the tables on the Eugenicists, Chesterton argues that those who seek to destroy others for their own improvement are themselves acting without sanity, without reason. They are, to put it in Chesterton’s terms, attempting to eliminate the headache by removing the head; and madness and meanness are clearly related—the one leading to the other (*Eugenics* 76). Again Chesterton’s ally in the *New Age* states, “Feeble-mindedness may or may not be the cause of most of the crime, immorality, and poverty that, at present, are so expensive to the nation; but it is not so clear that it is less expensive to the nation to call these people ‘defectives,’ or that the cure is to prevent them from breeding” (*New Age* 92)

Eugenics inhumanely eliminates those whom others refuse to recognize as human. It is utterly self-reflexive, monological, and detrimental to the human race because it operates with the most sinister of aims—cutting off not only the discourse of the other but the others themselves. Such inhumanity is for Chesterton madness itself.

### *Science and the State*

Lawrence Clipper in his brief treatment of *Eugenics and Other Evils* argues that Chesterton's interest in Eugenics arose solely because the science posed the "most challenging threat to Distributism" (77). Clipper argues, for example, that Chesterton did not understand the population explosion as Shaw did and thus dismissed all concern for Eugenics in favor of his lofty economic ideal. While Chesterton does in fact relate Eugenics to Capitalism, Clipper misses the point entirely, but to his credit he does not ignore Chesterton's work. In order for Eugenics to be effectively applied, it must be systematically enforced. The Eugenicist cannot rely on the public to apply positive nor negative eugenics to itself through public service announcements. Thus Eugenics is inherently dangerous not only because it wars against the weak but also because it implies and necessitates a State ruthlessly devoted to its aims. Here Chesterton's ethics, political philosophy and theology meet. A champion of democracy, Chesterton also argues for the Distributist State, an economic system somewhere between capitalism and socialism best known by the slogan, "Three Acres and a Cow." The economic system valued liberty, equality, democracy, and private property

among other things, all of which were affirmed by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* written in 1891.

Though it never really had the backing to be enacted and Chesterton was often chided for his obsession with it, Distributism had several positive features which Dermot Quinn notes. "For all its romanticism and occasional fetishism, Distributism represented an eloquent testimonial that the dignity of the human person transcended the market-place or the factory floor" (519). Given his involvement in political philosophy and his advocacy of an economic system that hovered between Socialism and Capitalism, Chesterton cannot be considered simply an enemy of the State as an entity in itself; but for the State to enforce eugenic theories would be "to create a great evil" rather than "to cure a great evil" (*Eugenics* 24). Such a state must be rejected, he argues, because such a Eugenic State is in its essence an anarchic state. "Anarchy is that condition of mind or methods in which you cannot stop yourself. It is the loss of that self-control which can return to the normal. It is not anarchy because men are permitted to begin uproar, extravagance, experiment, peril. It is anarchy when people cannot *end* these things" (Chesterton, *Eugenics* 27).

Eugenics is one of those things which, once begun, cannot easily be stopped. The Eugenic State has "no power of distinction, or sense of proportion," as evidenced by its feeble attempts to define feeble-mindedness (*Eugenics* 29). This, Chesterton suggests is the essence of anarchy. Whether in the State or the person, the uncontrollable is a sign of madness and must be resisted. Aidan Nichols relates this concern to Chesterton's abiding love of the created world.

He insisted that things must be “loved first and improved afterwards”: hence it was necessary to be, in turn, both a reactionary and a revolutionary. This attitude, founded on the two concepts of divine creation and human subcreation, expunged all trace of anarchism or nihilism from his political ethics. (163)

The State as well as the individual, if it is not to become solipsistic, must be something other than a self-reflexive, monological thing.

The danger of a scientific state is not just the loss of liberty, Chesterton sees, but also the elevation of science to the status of religion (“Separation” 355). Though called the Age of Science, Chesterton argues that it is nonetheless an “age of faith,” if not an age of “fancy” (“Science and the Drift” 125). Faith is required in an age of Science as much as in an age of Faith; the object of devotion is simply transferred from God to Science. Chesterton recognizes the “all-encompassing” nature of religion, whether it be Christianity or Scientism. (As Stanley Jaki points out, this is what Chesterton attacked, while he also engaged with science itself (51).) This is not to suggest that science and religion are necessarily contradictory. In fact, Chesterton with Augustine sees that all truth is God’s truth wherever it may be found. As Chesterton puts it, “scientific truth cannot contradict religious truth. That is only another way of saying that truth cannot contradict truth. But sham science and false religion can contradict each other, or corroborate each other, or do anything they choose” (“Sham” 588). The Scientific State, then, is dangerous because it elevates Scientism to the place previously held by religious devotion.

The Eugenic State is not only related to but the result of a Capitalistic economy, Chesterton argues. When persons are measured by their economic worth alone, those unfit to produce must be eliminated. The Eugenicist “laments

the breaking of the tools of Mammon much more than the breaking of the images of God” (*Eugenics* 92-3). This was made clear in *Rerum Novarum*, wherein Leo recognized that human beings in a capitalistic economy are “often treated as mere instruments for money-making” (42). The connection is not unfounded. Canovan notes that one reason why Eugenics flourished as it did was that it “offered a solution to the problem that capitalists had created for themselves: what to do with the masses of wretched, half-starved, stunted ‘unemployables’ in the slums of the great cities” (70). She proceeds to show that Chesterton noted the danger of ignoring the economic system that created the problem and choosing instead to obliterate the problem, presumably unaware that this method would eventually replicate the problem in new terms (77).

The Capitalist State and the Eugenic State are the prisons of humanity, Chesterton argues, because they limit the liberty that is hugely fundamental to humanity created *imago Dei* and more narrowly fundamental to English society. Capitalism is not as bad as Socialism but an evil nonetheless. But just as liberty is fundamental to English life so are Industrialism and Capitalism; however when liberty is lost, the “English will have destroyed England” (*Eugenics* 106). A few pages later, he writes, “Capitalism is a corrupt prison. That is the best that can be said for Capitalism. But it is something to be said for it; for a man is a little freer in that corrupt prison than he would be in a complete prison” (*Eugenics* 109). In other words, Capitalism is at least better than Socialism, presumably because it retains belief in private property.

Chesterton’s estimate of Capitalism is not unrelated to his views on Democracy. Eugenics, he argues, is essentially aristocratic, as is Capitalism—it



favors the wealthy few. This is an affront to Chesterton because in Chesterton's theological vision all of humanity equally bears the *imago Dei*.<sup>3</sup> There is at work in *Eugenics* a "plutocratic impulse." "[N]o one thinks of applying it to the prominent classes. No one thinks of applying it where it could most easily be applied" (*Eugenics* 96). Again Chesterton relies on fundamental Catholic doctrine, without saying so, anticipating such formal declarations as these from *Casti Connubi*: "The life of each is equally sacred, and no one has the power, not even the public authority, to destroy it" (64). As Henri de Lubac writes,

For the divine image does not differ from one individual to another: in all it is the same image. The same mysterious participation in God which causes the soul to exist effects at one and the same time the unity of spirits among themselves. Whence comes the notion, so beloved of Augustinianism, of one spiritual family intended to form the one city of God. (29)

As Chesterton explicitly states in his *Illustrated London News* article dated 16 November 1927, "All this is horrible heathen nonsense, of course; and to me it is a mere denial of human dignity and of the image of God" ("Who Are the Unfit?" 421).

Not only is *Eugenics* fundamentally "plutocratic" but it also destroys the intrinsic worth of humanity by reducing them to animals. In addition to its sinister self-reflexive and monological nature, it is thoroughly reductionistic.

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<sup>3</sup>This is as good a place as any to briefly treat Chesterton's supposed anti-Semitism, which only bears mentioning because it has received critical attention, not because it actually exists in Chesterton's writing. Though we shall see in chapter five that he recognized many of the lenses through which he viewed the world, he did not possess a twenty-first century sensitivities. He referred to persons of Semitic descent as Jews and even sometimes referred, quite unfortunately, to blacks as "niggers." While not excusing the latter term, we must allow Chesterton to speak as a part of his own context and not make our own understandings retroactive. The present author is content to take Chesterton at his word when he writes, "If I were an enemy of the Jews, I should call myself an enemy of the Jews; if I were anything that could be called Anti-Jew, I should wish to be called Anti-Jew" ("On My Anti-Semitism" 382).

Eugenics reduces sacramental marriage itself and the most sacred act of marriage to little more than animalistic breeding of the species. But humans are an animal set apart. In addition to Catholic doctrine, Chesterton finds this claim to be held by one of his most cherished literary figures, Charles Dickens.

It is senseless to talk about breeding them; for they are not a breed. They are, in cold fact, what Dickens describes: "a dustbin of individual accidents," of damaged dignity, and often of damaged gentility. The class very largely consists of perfectly promising children, lost like *Oliver Twist*, or crippled like *Tiny Tim*. (*Eugenics* 97)

The human person is to be respected and valued because of the intrinsic worth of his humanity, regardless of his class or economic status. As Sheridan Gilley succinctly puts it in an essay devoted to Chesterton and the family, "All men are brothers, because all have the same heavenly Father. All men are equal, because all men are brothers. All men are equal, because all are sinners. All men are equal because all can be saints" (134). As if there were any doubt, *Rerum Novarum* had already made the nature of human dignity explicit well before Chesterton tackled Eugenics: "the true worth and nobility of man lie in his moral qualities, that is, in virtue; that virtue is, moreover, the common inheritance of men, equally within the reach of high and low, rich and poor" (24). Likewise *Rerum Novarum* spoke of the necessary solidarity with the poor. "As regards the State, the interests of all, whether high or low, are equal" (33). *Casti Connubi* would later admonish the Church in similar terms: "it is incumbent on the rich to help the poor, so that, having an abundance of this world's goods, they may not expend them fruitlessly or completely squander them, but employ them for the support and well-being of those who lack the necessities of life" (119).

Just as his advocacy of Democracy is linked to his belief that the *imago Dei* is equally intrinsic to all of humanity, so is his rejection of Calvinism as a theological system linked to his belief in human liberty, also fundamental to his understanding of the *imago Dei*. Thus he writes that “Calvinism is the most non-Christian of Christian systems,” so labeled because it denies, according to Chesterton, individual liberty in the most eternal matters (*Eugenics* 87). For Chesterton, Calvinism and Capitalism therefore go hand in hand, but in a more sinister fashion than Max Weber envisioned; they are both to be rejected, says Chesterton, because they are so conducive to the Eugenic State and more broadly because they deny humanity its humanness. In *What’s Wrong with the World*, Chesterton explicitly connects the two:

Now all our sociology and eugenics and the rest of it are not so much materialist as confusedly Calvinist, they are chiefly occupied in educating the child before he exists.[. . .] But though Mr. Shaw and his friends admit it is a superstition that a man is judged after death, they stick to their central doctrine, that he is judged before he is born. (154)

Claiming to understand and so “disbelieve” it, he rejects strongly any system of belief that infringes upon human liberty (“Hazy Language” 641).<sup>4</sup>

### *Social Ethics and Eugenics*

Just as Dean Inge saw the connection between Eugenics and other social issues of the day, so did Chesterton. He “despised” Birth Control and wrote extensively on the subject. Whereas Dean Inge connected it to Eugenics, Chesterton disconnected it to show that “it is a flat refusal to take the first and

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<sup>4</sup>GKC reduced Calvinism to a supralapsarian position of double predestination, and he failed to understand Calvinism’s deep rootage in the Augustinian doctrine of prevenient grace that he himself shared.

most obvious step along the road of Eugenics” (*Well*). Obviously, he was familiar with those arguments connecting the two issues, but he was rather convinced that it was “a weak and wobbly and cowardly thing” (*Well*). Interestingly one of his arguments against Birth Control is that it was not even employed with animals; thus Chesterton sees in Birth Control the same incompleteness of thought that he saw in Eugenics.

But the thing the capitalist newspapers call birth control is not control at all. It is the idea that people should be, in one respect, completely and utterly uncontrolled, so long as they can evade everything in the function that is positive and creative, and intelligent and worthy of a free man. (*Social Reform Versus Birth Control*)

Furthermore, he satirically links Birth Control and infanticide knowing that his audience will draw the obvious conclusion that infanticide is an outrage. He says that he will support Birth Control when he sees “a real pioneer and progressive leader coming out with a good, bold, scientific programme for drowning babies” (*Well*).

Concerning the intermarriage of the races, he clearly states that he disapproves of its disapproval in America. Chesterton equates lynching with eugenics “because it is done deliberately with the purpose of discouraging sex relations between two racial types which are considered incompatible” (“Becoming” 283). Additionally, he is not as concerned with discussions about abortion, euthanasia, suicide, and capital punishment. The first three are assumed to be morally unacceptable, and he finds only highly limited cases wherein capital punishment ought to be administered (“Hangmen” 269). He finds abortion “abominable,” and he recognizes the similarity between some

forms of Eugenics and infanticide (*Eugenics* 93). “I have seen versions of eugenics that come very near to infanticide. I had recently a discussion with so distinguished a cleric as the Dean of St. Paul’s in which he expressed a general sympathy with the eugenis, probably in entire innocence of what some of the eugenis say” (*Eugenics* 136). In his mind the plan of Eugenics is tantamount to infanticide. “If they do not propose to kill children, some at least propose to prevent them being born; and that negation may surely be a tragedy” (*Eugenics* 136). Chesterton so valued life and especially human life that he could not ever really comprehend these attempts to prevent and end so blessed a thing.

#### *Eugenics, Authority, and Incarnation*

It is necessary finally to analyze the theological bases for Chesterton’s opposition to Eugenics. Dean Inge considered Chesterton a mere mouthpiece for the Roman Catholic Church, which he thoroughly despised. *Casti Connubi*, written some years after Chesterton’s discourse on Eugenics, stated that “a characteristic of all true followers of Christ, lettered or unlettered, is to suffer themselves to be guided and led in all things that touch upon faith or morals by the Holy Church of God through its Supreme Pastor the Roman Pontiff, who is himself guided by Jesus Christ Our Lord” (104). It might be gathered from this assertion that Chesterton was simply articulating what he had already perceived to be the voice of the Church. But Chesterton makes no appeal to the Papal authority of the Church; he makes only slight appeals to the tradition of the Church; and he makes almost no reference to Scripture in his defense of the “extermination of eugenics.” Chesterton’s part in the dialogue surrounding

Eugenics rested almost entirely upon the power of logic and reason to discern the inherent weakness of the eugenicist claims. His position is inherently based on the doctrines of Creation and Incarnation, but Chesterton rarely makes this explicit. This is ironic because it was Dean Inge that so championed Reason, but it is Chesterton that employs Reason to greater effect. While Chesterton's anti-eugenics position anticipates the Pope's own position on the subject, his faith does not exclude reason but is rather bolstered by it.

Perhaps his greatest theological appeal is the doctrine of the *imago Dei* which is rooted in the doctrines of Creation and Incarnation. The *imago Dei* as it relates to Creation has already been analyzed because Chesterton himself makes so many statements that either declare or depend on it. It is a doctrine central to Catholic thought. In fact, de Lubac begins his *Catholicism* with this doctrine. "The supernatural dignity of one who has been baptized rests, we know, on the natural dignity of man, though it surpasses it in an infinite manner[. . .] Thus the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, a supernatural unity, supposes a previous natural unity, the unity of the human race" (25). Yet the doctrine of the Incarnation bears mentioning as it relates to Chesterton's position on Eugenics. As Schall notes, "For him the Incarnation was no mere accident, as if the stable at Bethlehem was merely an incidental event in the history of religion. Rather it was at the heart of religion that God becomes man, not as a philosopher or a banker, but as a child in an obscure part of the world. These are the places in which all the great romances and adventures begin and end" (593). The Incarnation is central to Christianity. As Chesterton put it in *The Everlasting*

*Man*, “Even if Christianity was one vast universal blunder, it is still a blunder as solitary as the Incarnation” (334).

Not only is the Incarnation fundamental to Christianity, but it relates to Chesterton’s opposition to Eugenics. Chesterton was fundamentally opposed to Eugenics not only because of the stamp of the *imago Dei* upon humanity at Creation but also because the Incarnation has restored that mark of the Creator, after it had been severely marred in the Fall. As Denis Yves writes, “The dignity of man is first founded upon his natural dependence on his Creator. Yet the special degree of greatness that affects man, even when he belongs to the humblest spheres of society, directly originates in the mystery of Incarnation” (62).

The Incarnation (re-)dignifies humanity for at least two reasons pertinent to a discussion of Eugenics. The Incarnation restores the marred image of God in man. As de Lubac writes, the Incarnation is a work of unity. “[T]he redemption being a work of restoration will appear to us by that very fact as the recovery of lost unity—the recovery of supernatural unity of man with God, but equally of the unity of men among themselves” (35). Thus the work of redemption is holistic rather than individualistic, though it is both individually and corporately received.

Christ from the very first moment of his existence virtually bears all men within himself [. . .] He incorporated himself into our humanity, and incorporated it in himself [. . .] Whole and entire he will bear it then to Calvary, whole and entire he will raise it from the dead, whole and entire he will save it. Christ the Redeemer does not offer salvation merely to each one; he effects it, he is himself the salvation of the whole, and for each one salvation consists in a personal ratification of his original “belonging” to Christ, so that he be not cast out, cut off from this Whole. (de Lubac 37-9)

Eugenics, Chesterton sees, tampers with the essential goodness of the created order, with what God has called good. But equally important, the Incarnation is that doctrine that God became man—not just any man, but a poor man. As Yves writes, the Incarnation itself “brings about a radical reversal of human values” for in it God not only became Man, but he became a poor, destitute child (68). As Chesterton writes in *The Everlasting Man*, “And there follows in this strange story the idea of an upheaval of heaven. That is the paradox of the whole position; that henceforth the highest thing can only work from below” (313). Chesterton rejects Eugenics and finds solidarity with the target of Eugenics—the poor—for multitudinous reasons not the least of which hinges upon the Incarnation of our Lord. And this reliance on the most fundamental Christian doctrine will energize Chesterton’s debate with Inge.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Literary Interlocutors and Dialogical Style

#### *Introduction*

Having explored dialogical style theoretically and having resituated *Eugenics and Other Evils* into its original dialogical context, we will now explore how this dialogical non-fiction energized Chesterton's imaginative works, particularly *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), but we will also support the analysis of *Thursday* with references to *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904), *The Ball and the Cross* (1909), and *Manalive* (1912), the four together constituting Chesterton's first four novels. These novels, Early and Pre-War as classified by Ian Boyd, roughly correspond with the time Chesterton was debating the question of eugenics. (*Eugenics and Other Evils* was published in 1922 as a compilation of previously written essays.) Furthermore, as Mark Knight points out, the period between the years 1890 and 1914 were the years "in which Chesterton engaged most successfully with contemporary ideas and writers. It was also the period in which Chesterton produced his most imaginative writing" (Chesterton 11). Some of the novels clearly pre-date his interest in eugenics, but the point is not to establish which came first, but to establish that Chesterton's style is essentially a dialogical one. As demonstrated in chapter one, this is a style that Chesterton began developing from his earliest writing. *The Man Who Was Thursday* is considered Chesterton's best novel and so deserves the fullest analysis. This dialogical style seems evident in at least three qualities common to

all of the aforementioned novels: the use of polyglot language, the characters as embodiments of particular philosophies, and comic vision as a dialogical vision. Regarding the latter category, our interest will concentrate only on the themes of the work insofar as they are dialogical. The themes themselves have been satisfactorily explicated and analyzed elsewhere.

Several critics have noticed the important role that dialogue plays in Chesterton, but none has yet treated it as essential to Chesterton's style or meaning. John Coates comes closest in his essay, "*The Ball and The Cross and the Edwardian Novel of Ideas*," wherein he distinguishes the Chestertonian novel from the (Henry) Jamesian novel; but his larger concern is contextual rather than stylistic. G. K. Chesterton, Coates argues, assumes a dialogical relationship with both his audience and with other texts, whereas James assumed the novel to be a self-enclosed system ("Ball" 53).<sup>1</sup> In this regard, Chesterton is quite similar to H. G. Wells ("Ball" 55). Coates writes:

[H]is approach to his controversial opponents was influenced by that sense . . . that different and differing men each had his story to tell, that their perceptions, emotional biases, the angle from which they viewed the world, while certainly not of equal value, were all, in some measure, at least potentially, glimpses of a part of the truth. The mistake of those in error lay in imagining their part was the whole. ("Ball" 61)

As Robert L. Caserio sees it, the correct interpretation of a Chesterton text "can only be arrived at through double or multiple ambiguous and equivocal meanings, which are the necessary detour whereby a sure direction or aim, and a

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<sup>1</sup>Additionally, John Coates has collected and revised several of his previous essays into *G. K. Chesterton as Controversialist, Essayist, Novelist and Critic* (Mellon: Mellon P, 2002); however, as the title indicates Coates interprets Chesterton primarily in polemical terms.

certain belief, are discovered and achieved” (65-66). Multivocality in Chesterton leads not, Caserio justly asserts, to open-endedness but to “definiteness” (65).

Lawrence Clipper similarly notes that Chesterton’s novels are “combined with what Northrop Frye calls ‘anatomies’—fictions which are essentially written for purposes of presenting and analyzing ideas” (120). This concern with ideas Clipper rightly connects with Chesterton’s journalistic vocation. “His life was spent pouring his ideas into his weekly columns, letters to editors, book-length studies, debates with Socialists and atheists, and lectures to generally enchanted audiences” (120-21). And as we have already seen, Chesterton thrived on interlocution, his lectures failing miserably compared to his public debates.

This is not to deny the artistry of Chesterton’s fiction; as we shall see he develops an artistic style unique and dialogical. As Coates writes, “Such an examination reveals a close-knit, coherent handling of themes and language, skilful in its reference to other languages and rhetorics and in its changes of tone. There is certainly an art here if the reader is prepared to evaluate it in terms of its own context and intention” (“Ball” 69). Ian Boyd, like Clipper, views Chesterton as essentially a journalist, though he does not deny the artistic value of Chesterton’s writing (*Novels* xi). Boyd argues that Chesterton was an artistic journalist. “Occasionally, scattered passages repeat arguments which occur in the books of essays, but usually the arguments presented in them are presented in entirely imaginative terms. In fact they do not lend themselves to any easy description, for they are works which are a curious blend of literature and propaganda” (*Novels* 5). Margaret Canovan notes the specifically theological nature of this blend of art and thesis (117). Chesterton, as we shall see in the

following chapter, assumes and makes explicit his assumption that faith is a totalizing thing that cannot be entirely separated from artistic production.

However, not all critics recognize the dialogical aspects of Chesterton's imaginative work (none sees it as essential to his style); furthermore, they honor his dialogism only as hidden polemics. Mark Knight suggests that the style of Chesterton's novels is essentially polemical, even though they possess the "spirit of dialogue" (10). Noel Peacock finds Chesterton's dialogue purely farcical. He writes that while Chesterton "appear[s] to engage frankly in the heteroglossia of the Edwardian cultural climate [. . . this] is largely for show, since the explicit articulation of a specific ideology in Chesterton is managed through the unquestioning and explicit subordination of opposing social voices to the dominant ideology of his own texts" (218-9). In this chapter and the one to follow we will attempt to demonstrate that Chesterton's style is essentially dialogical—in both his imaginative novels and his literary and cultural criticism.

#### *The Dialogical Context of The Man Who Was Thursday*

It is no secret that Chesterton wrote *Thursday*, the novel Kingsley Amis called "the most thrilling book I have ever read," in some measure to work out his own struggle with the nihilism that he found inherent in the art of the Decadents and Impressionists (Introduction 1). As Witold Ostrowski writes, "*The Man Who Was Thursday* is a novel of ideas—a clash of two opposing philosophies of life: Anarchic Nihilism, which wishes to destroy everything, and Christianity which wants to fight evil, and thus preserve creation" (152). Similarly, Stephen Medcalf writes that "underlying *The Man Who Was Thursday* is a mystical experience or

realisation to which Chesterton came in the summer of 1894 after a period of mental pain and obsession with nihilism and with evil” (458). Blending Chesterton’s words with her own, Chesterton’s biographer Alzina Stone Dale describes this period in the following terms:

The early 1890’s were the height of a period that was aesthetically lush and decadent, with the kind of depression that resulted from “the sense that man’s two great inspirations had failed him . . . the Christian religion . . . and the republican enthusiasm.” As a result, the times “were like one long afternoon in a rich house on a rainy day. . . . Everybody believed that anything happening was even duller than nothing happening.” (37-38)

Chesterton emerged from this dark night of nihilism with a renewed optimism but not with the melioristic optimism of the age. It was a Christian optimism, no doubt encouraged by his wife Frances, that would later blossom into his acceptance of the Catholic faith. This optimism would mark the entire corpus of his writings. As Jay Corrin notes, “The urge to retrieve some dignity and hope for man was so intense in Chesterton that a deep-seated rebellion against the *fin de siècle* permanently marked all of his writings” (6). As Chesterton put it himself, “I was full of a new and fiery resolution to write against the Decadents and the Pessimists who ruled the culture of the age” (*Autobiography* 97). However, what emerges from this experience is not a polemical style so much as a dialogical one; though he writes against particular philosophies that he regards as pernicious, he does not write to silence other perspectives but to engage them and to thus enlarge his own positions. As Coates notes with reference to Chesterton’s interaction with Shaw and Wells, “Chesterton felt a wish not merely, or perhaps primarily, to refute or to destroy error but also to disentangle a web of thought, some of which, at least in embryonic form was valuable, some destructive” (“Ball”

61). Thus Coates concludes that Chesterton's "style is marked by referential complexity and sub-text, by agility, and by little spurts of surprise, bathos and farce as he attacks concepts and a language from one angle after another" ("Ball" 65-6).

*Polyglot Language in The Man Who Was Thursday*

As we have already seen in chapter one, Bakhtin makes important distinctions between the epic and the novel. The epic embodies an absolute past with which the author and the reader alike are unable to interact. Its language is absolute. When the narrator interpolates his or her own language into the epic, Bakhtin asserts that the novel is then born. The epic as a literary work is monological—it is the epic hero's language as given by the narrator. The novel, in contrast to the epic, consists of a polyglot language—that is, it is composed of many languages, each distinct from the other. There is at a minimum the narrative and the characters' interaction with that narrative, but often there are multitudinous languages embedded within the text, but also room for the reader to interact with the text. Bakhtin relates this linguistic complexity distinction to time. "The novel," Bakhtin writes, "comes into contact with the spontaneity of the inconclusive present; this is what keeps the genre from congealing. The novelist is drawn toward everything that is not yet completed" (27).<sup>2</sup> The novel's

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<sup>2</sup>An interesting comparison to Bakhtin's distinction between the epic and the novel is to be found in the distinction between Evangelicalism's (general) understanding of tradition and Roman Catholicism's historical understanding of tradition. The former is dead: to use Bakhtin's language it is congealed; whereas the latter is a living thing that "is not yet completed," though it is of course rooted in the past. A re-appropriation of an orthodox understanding of tradition would then allow Evangelicalism to "retrieve" the historic teaching and traditions of the Church and to "renew" itself not through rote re-enactment but through dialogue with the past. See especially D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition and Renewing Evangelicalism*.

polyglot language stands in direct contrast to the epic, Bakhtin argues by holding the epic past at a distance that permits no challenge of its assumptions. Thus the novel as a form is intrinsically dialogical as the epic is not.

Theoretically, according to Bakhtin, we could find the polyglot language of the novel at any place within the novel. To demonstrate this confluence of languages present in *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*, we will begin, rather arbitrarily, by examining the opening paragraph:

The suburb of Saffron Park lay on the sunset side of London, as red and ragged as a cloud of sunset. It was built of a bright brick throughout; its sky-line was fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild. It had been the outburst of a speculative builder, faintly tinged with art, who called its architecture sometimes Elizabethan and sometimes Queen Anne, apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were identical. It was described with some justice as an artistic colony, though it never in any definable way produced any art. [. . .] Thus, and thus only, the whole place had properly to be regarded; it had to be considered not so much as a workshop for artists, but as a frail but finished work of art. A man who stepped into its social atmosphere felt as if he had stepped into a written comedy. (31-35)

The first two and a half sentences are clearly written in the voice of the narrator of the novel. He opens the novel in his own voice. It is the voice of a third person omniscient narrator. But the authorial voice is inserted in the last phrase of the third sentence. The first two and a half sentences are pure description, but when the text states, “apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were identical” the reader hears the satiric voice of the author himself. The voice of the narrator resumes in sentence four, but again the author interpolates his own voice in the second half of the sentence. The narrator attempts to give a fair and forthright description of Saffron Park, but the author juxtaposes his own belief that this artistic colony ironically has produced no works of art. It appears that in

the three sentences that follow the author has usurped the voice of the narrator thus making a distinction between the two voices difficult. The narrator clearly returns by writing responsively to the authorial interpolation and hinting at exasperation, “Even if the people were not ‘artists,’ the whole was nevertheless artistic” (35).

It may seem that this is simply a narrator given to irony, rather than two distinct voices at work in the narrative. However, we know enough about Chesterton to know that the fictional Saffron Park represents the actual Bedford Park in London with which Chesterton was quite familiar; but not every reader has access to this sort of biographical detail, so further explanation is necessary. The structure of the sentences themselves suggests two distinct voices. The sentences begin with descriptive narrative framed in independent clauses whose meaning is nullified by dependent additions that end the sentences.

It had been the outburst of a speculative builder, faintly tinged with art, who called its architecture sometimes Elizabethan and sometimes Queen Anne, apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were identical. It was described with some justice as an artistic colony, though it never in any definable way produced any art. (Chesterton, *Thursday* 32-34)

The first half of the sentences consist of pure description without subversion, but they are followed by clauses that ironically suggest the reversal of what the narrator has just stated. For establishing the thesis that we hear two voices rather than one, it is important to note that the irony appears only in the dependent clauses. The interpolation of the author is not as forthright as the voice of the narrator but rather depends upon the narrator to make his meaning. His interpolations do not possess complete meaning apart from the narrator’s



meaning: dependent clauses cannot stand by themselves and still produce logical, complete thought.

The sentences that follow seem usurped by the author but not to the exclusion of the narrator's voice, so that no distinct, individual voice is present but rather a confluence of narrator and author.

But although its pretensions to be an intellectual centre were a little vague, its pretensions to be a pleasant place were quite indisputable. The stranger who looked for the first time at the quaint red houses could only think how very oddly shaped the people must be who could fit in to them. Nor when he met the people was he disappointed in this respect. The place was not only pleasant, but perfect, if once he could regard it not as a deception but rather as a dream. Even if the people were not "artists," the whole was nevertheless artistic. (Chesterton, *Thursday* 35)

Again the structure of the sentences themselves points us in the direction of two voices. This time the dependent clause precedes the independent clause. The authorial voice inserts its own completeness of meaning by following the dependent clause with the narrator's independent claim. The sentence that follows further muddles the matter. Thematically the sentences beginning "The stranger" and "Nor when" completely mix author and narrator; but in the sentence beginning "The place," the narrator attempts to regain control of the narrative. He describes the park as perfect, only to have his description undermined by another satirical statement undercutting the perfection of the park. The narrator demands control of the narrative with the sentence that follows. "Even if the people were not 'artists,' the whole was nevertheless artistic" (35). Regardless of the authorial satire, the narrator must return the reader to his original purpose: Saffron Park is an artistic colony. The voice of the author has caused the reader to question the artistic quality of the art colony, but the

narrator insists that despite his interplay with the author, this is indeed a colony of artists. In fact, he argues that the poet, whose name the reader learns is Lucian Gregory, is not only a poet but himself a poem. The philosopher is himself a philosophy, and the biologist is himself a wonder of creation; the park itself, contrary to authorial claims that it had produced no art, is a work of art itself, the narrator argues.

At the outset of the novel, the reader is thus confronted with multiple languages even before any actual dialogue occurs. The narrator has to tell a story, and the author has to make an interpretation of it. Though the narrator is hindered in telling that story because of authorial interpolations, he regains control of the conversation by the end of the paragraph. This pattern continues with greater and lesser degrees of complexity throughout the entirety of the novel. As Bakhtin suggests in his work on Dickens, such analysis is without end, so it is impossible (and unproductive) to attempt an analysis of every word and sentence of the novel.

However, an analysis of the final paragraphs of the novel suggests that Chesterton employs a style given to polyglot languages for reasons other than self-referential intertextuality. The final paragraphs read as follows:

Syme sprang to his feet, shaking from head to foot.  
 “I see everything,” he cried, “everything that there is. Why does each thing on the earth war against each other thing? Why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemmer, so that by tears and

torture we may earn the right to say to this man, 'You lie!' No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, 'We also have suffered.'

"It is not true that we have never been broken. We have been broken upon the wheel. It is not true that we have never descended from these thrones. We have descended into hell. We were complaining of unforgettable miseries even at the very moment when this man entered insolently to accuse us of happiness. I repel the slander; we have not been happy. I can answer for every one of the great guards of Law whom he has accused. At least—"

He had turned his eyes so as to see suddenly the great face of Sunday, which wore a strange smile.

"Have you," he cried in a dreadful voice, "have you ever suffered?"

As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon, which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" (Chesterton, *Thursday* 262-3)

The first sentence is the voice of the narrator. But the voice of the narrator literally gives way to the voice of Gabriel Syme. The reader hears Syme's exact words, but these words are also Sunday's repetition of Christ's query at the Last Supper. Though the reader does not actually hear Christ himself in this passage, his voice is an implied addition to the conversation. The voice of the narrator resumes the storytelling only to insert an additional voice, that of Sunday. "Have you,' he cried in a dreadful voice, 'have you ever suffered?'" (263). While readers hear the voice of Sunday, they also hear the narrator insisting that Sunday's voice is a "dreadful" one. The narrator continues omnisciently, but clearly toward the end of that paragraph he assumes the perspective of Syme. The narrator notes that Syme hears a voice that Syme seems to recognize.

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of Bakhtin's theory found in *The Man Who Was Thursday* appears in the paragraph under examination. When

readers encounter the following sentence, they hear multitudinous voices whether or not they realize it. “Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, “Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?” (263). The narrator is speaking, so it is the voice of the narrator that the reader hears; but the narrator is relaying Syme’s perspective, so the reader hears the voice of Syme through the narrator. Finally the narrator inserts the voice of Sunday into the text. Yet Sunday’s words are an exact quotation of the words of Christ to his disciples. Thus does the reader hear the voices of the narrator, Syme, Sunday, and Christ all in this paragraph. The two paragraphs that follow (not quoted because of their length) return the reader to the voice of the narrator. There are no authorial interpolations; as such, the tone differs substantially from the first paragraph of the novel. Chesterton then makes use of many languages to form one unified voice, but a voice itself in dialogue with the response of every reader.

In all of Chesterton’s novels such dialogical interpolations serve as an important rhetorical device. While this has come to be an accepted novelistic device, Chesterton’s employment of dialogue is best viewed over and against other Edwardian writers to fully appreciate the dialogical significance of the dialogues themselves. Henry James’s novels are characterized by long passages of uninterrupted narration, as are the novels of H. G. Wells and George Orwell. The entire first chapter of Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* has one pithy line of dialogue. Even this, while in the voice of a particular character, is closer to monologue than dialogue because it interacts with no other character but only confirms what the narrator is saying. The same is true throughout much of

James's *The Spoils of Poynton*, for example. When the reader hears Mrs. Gereth's voice in the first chapter, it is only to confirm what has been learned from the narration itself. This is not to suggest of course that real dialogue is not present in the novels of these writers; however, it is to highlight the contrast with Chesterton. Conversely, in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, dialogue dominates the novel by the second half of the first chapter. This knack for dialogue is certainly why Chesterton's friend and sparring partner G. B. Shaw praised so highly Chesterton's attempt at drama, his successful play *Magic*. Furlong notes that Shaw "forced" Chesterton to write it, even though Chesterton continued his dialogue with Shaw within the drama (16).

Mark Knight, in his brilliant book *Chesterton and Evil*, recognizes an explicit mode of dialogue present in *The Man Who Was Thursday*. He writes, "While there are various conversational modes to be found in *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*, confession is the one with the most overt religious overtones" (127). Though this claim may seem rather inconsequential, it is not. For in "addition to recognizing the presence of another person who will hear what is being said, the act of confession places considerable trust in that person" (127). Furthermore, this confessional style intersects with Chesterton's meaning. As Knight contends, "Confession restores an individual's ability to relate to the world and constructs a necessary relationship with that world. In doing so, it resists the solipsism Chesterton identifies at the root of evil" (139).

Not only does Chesterton's confessional stylistic resist solipsism but it does so dialogically—the only way to open the sinful isolation of the self to redemptive engagement with others. Chesterton's essential Roman Catholicism

then emerges well before he has been received into the church. Confession as misunderstood in many Protestant circles is not the isolated experience of the individual, but in Roman Catholic practice necessarily occurs in the presence of another. Whether it takes literary or religious form, confession is an exquisite representation of the dialogue between God and humankind, between the person and the ultimate Other. The act of confession is not isolated from the act of forgiveness, for the two act in tandem. Confession is a response to the voice of the Other, and forgiveness is a response to confession. So it is not without consequence that Knight identifies confession as the primary conversational mode at work in *Thursday*. If the novel is intended to resist solipsism and employs confession to that end, then style and meaning intersect. The dialogue itself becomes part of the meaning of the novel.

*Characters as Allegorical Representations of Particular Philosophies in The Man Who Was Thursday*

In his essay entitled, “Chesterton’s Christ-Centered View of History,” Warren H. Carroll writes that “it is above all Chesterton’s method and purpose to set before the reader a *point of view* and what it shows” (303). Similarly, F. A. Lea writes of Chesterton, “We have said that he knew his opponents’ viewpoints better than they knew them themselves” (99). These two observations suggest the dialogical nature of Chestertonian plots for the characters themselves in the novels are actually the embodiments of particular points of view or philosophies; yet Chesterton refuses to stoop to caricature. As Stanley Jaki notes:

Cyrus Pym, the scientist in *Manalive* who viewed ‘things in abstract,’ was no caricature. He still embodies all those scientists who preach, like [Jacques] Monod, that all is chance or necessity or

both. Cyrus Pym is still a perfect stand-in for those scientists who, like I. I. Rabi, exalt science, which alone has the imagination to reveal in things the glory of God, and debunk arts and letters, including Shakespeare, as “mere gossip which does not take us outside ourselves.” (52)

This does not mean that there are no isolated cases of caricature, rather it means that the main characters are believable and fair representations of opposing viewpoints. As Boyd notes, “Another and more important example of symbolic writing is the use of symbolic types as characters. In fact the characters must be identified as types if the novel is to be understood” (*Novels* 20). Gardner also points out that many of the characters with opposing philosophies actually become friends throughout the course of the novels (38). These reconciliations are central to Chesterton’s imaginative work because, as Boyd notes, it “is like his other writing in its concern with the conflict of ideas”; thus, he uses the form of the novel “as a way of mediating imaginatively a particular political view of life” (*Novels* 7, 9). As Furbank notes, “In [Chesterton’s] fantastic novels you never for a moment leave the weekly column or the debating-hall; it is simply that the whole universe becomes a debating-hall, and the argument happens to be continued on the dome of St Paul’s or the pantomime battlefield of Notting Hill” (16). This dialogizing of characters demands the participation of the audience. As Coates writes, “The novelist would be expecting a reader-response based on discussion, on provocation, on the exploration of a shared experience, and one which assumed on the reader’s part a knowledge of other relevant texts” (“The Ball” 53).

It comes as no surprise, then, that in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, a novel that has been described as allegorical, at least in part, that the characters

would represent something other than themselves. But whereas in a strict allegory, such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the literal meaning is fairly straightforward and easily discerned—it is intended to be—Chesterton's novel employs various allegorical methods that are not easily separated into literal and allegorical meanings. Much of the story's meaning lies in the story itself. That it comes to no decisive conclusion does not mean that there is no conclusive point, but that the conversation and debate itself seems to be the larger point of the novel. As Michael Finch points out, "Besides the two chief characters Chesterton had introduced five others, each representing different aspects of his central argument" (222).<sup>3</sup> The seemingly inconsequential characters also possess relevance as important figures in the overall conversation. Similarly, Boyd notes that in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, "Buck is important because he presents Chesterton's view of the quintessential business man, and James Barker, although insignificant as an individual, is important as the very ideal of the Chestertonian politician" (*Novels* 11). In other words, part of Chesterton's dialogizing style includes characters as the embodiment of various philosophies that interact with one another. This coinherence of style and meaning in the novels reveals that the two realms cannot be disjoined.

Gabriel Syme is the chief protagonist of *The Man Who Was Thursday*. It is his journey into the strange underworld of London that the reader follows. While he does profess to be the "poet of law, a poet of order; nay, he said he was a poet of respectability," his philosophy is better understood in contrast to the

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<sup>3</sup>The character of Sunday has received extensive treatment elsewhere, but I have included a brief discussion of his character in Appendix B.



philosophy of Lucian Gregory, the chief antagonist of the novel. Syme is described as the “second poet” and the “new poet” of Saffron Park, who “signalised his entrance by differing with the established poet” (37, 38). Lucian Gregory, on the other hand, whose red hair sets him apart from the blonde-haired Syme, was the presiding poet of Saffron Park where for some time he “had reigned without a rival” (37). Gregory, whose first name clearly connects him to the Biblical adversary, claims to be an anarchist—the opposite of law, order, and respectability. His philosophy of poetry follows: “An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything” (37).

By the end of chapter three, Lucian Gregory all but disappears from the plot. He does not return until the final pages of the novel in the fifteenth chapter, appropriately entitled “The Accuser.” When Gregory reappears he is clearly identified with Satan in a quotation of a passage from Job. In the meantime, the plot is concerned with the seven members of the Central European Council, presumably an anarchical cabal; however, the six members excluding Sunday are in fact undercover detectives, seeking, as the final chapters will uncover, an answer to the seeming meaninglessness of suffering. As such, the various council members have a similar representation as does Gabriel Syme. The detectives, Syme included, represent anyone who has ever posed the central question of theodicy. Suffering cannot be made sense of in an anarchic world—if nothing makes sense then neither does suffering—but the detectives find that there is only one true anarchist, so they seek an explanation for suffering in a world that is ordered. If God exists and He is good, then why do people suffer unjustly?

These characters stand in contrast to Lucian Gregory, who insists that the universe is a meaningless realm. When he claims that a “poet is always an anarchist” and an “artist disregards all Governments, abolishes all conventions,” the reader is right to identify him with the Decadents’ “Art for Art’s Sake” philosophy of poetry (49, 39). Though Professor de Worms who serves as Friday on the Council seems to represent Nietzsche, the reader must remember that he too is a detective, so that the sham of his character might actually be superimposed onto Lucian Gregory. After all, the Deceiver has many disguises. The Professor’s Nietzschean claims are, indeed, made under the cover of disguise; Lucian Gregory, however, makes similar claims without disguise. Most certainly, the reader is to identify the Professor, that “German Nihilist” with the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche without actually implicating Friday himself (99, 140).<sup>4</sup> The reader is to make the connection between the philosophy espoused by the Professor in disguise and the actual beliefs of Lucian Gregory which are representative of the age. In fact, the description of the chase is symbolic of how Nietzschean philosophy had enveloped the age and Chesterton in particular. When being pursued by Professor de Worms, no matter how quickly Syme flees, he cannot rid himself of de Worms just as G. K. C. felt that Nietzsche was haunting the whole modern world. Elsewhere, Chesterton wrote, “I am not haunted by Nietzsche. He seems to be an ordinary German Protestant Sophist, with a considerable literary talent. It is not I, but the whole modern world that is

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<sup>4</sup>Chesterton’s disdain for Calvinism precludes interpreting Professor de Worms as representing Luther.

haunted with Nietzsche” (qtd. in Boyd, *Novels* 27-29). As Flannery O’Connor said, “nihilism is the gas we breathe.” The narrator states of Syme:

[B]y the time that he had completed about twenty alternate angles and described an unthinkable polygon, he paused to listen for any sound of pursuit. [. . .] But when a few hundred yards farther on he stood still again to listen, his heart stood still also, for he heard from that space of rugged stones the clinking crutch and labouring feet of the infernal cripple. (Chesterton, *Thursday* 122-23)

Syme, like Chesterton, makes “unthinkable” arrangements to escape the hounding Professor and his philosophy of nihilism, but he is unable to escape. At one point, Syme even “repressed an elemental impulse to leap over the side” because he could not find reprieve from Professor de Worms (122). Chesterton himself, as previously noted, once contemplated the idea of suicide. It is in this passage that the reader fully understands how dangerously Chesterton viewed the encroaching nihilism of the Mauve Decade, thus connecting the disguise of Professor de Worms with Lucian Gregory.

Furthermore, it is in the context of encroaching nihilism that the London sky grows dark and oppressive.<sup>5</sup> Though the weather changes throughout the novel have caused trouble for some of Chesterton’s critics, this particular weather change is important for its symbolism. The narrator states:

The sky above was loaded with the clouds of snow, leaving London in a darkness and oppression premature for that hour of the evening. On each side of Syme the walls of the alley were blind and featureless; there was no little window or any kind of eye. He felt a new impulse to break out of this hive of houses, and to get once more into the open and lamplit street. Yet he rambled and dodged for a long time before he struck the main thoroughfare. When he did so, he struck it much farther up than he had fancied. He came

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<sup>5</sup>The Weather is often symbolic in Chesterton and might be considered to constitute a character itself but that is another essay for another time.

out into what seemed the vast and void of Ludgate Circus, and saw St. Paul's Cathedral sitting in the sky. (Chesterton, *Thursday* 123)

Syme has entered the labyrinth of darkness akin to Chesterton's and the age's own encounter with nihilism—a time marked by moral darkness, political oppression, and religious blindness. Furthermore, it would appear that because Syme sees no possible way out of the labyrinth of darkness, he lingers in the shadows for some time before happening out into Ludgate Circus where the great dome of Wren's St. Paul's fills his vision.

The vision of St. Paul's Cathedral is a small though momentous event in the novel. Syme describes his experience:

Under the white fog of snow high up in the heaven the whole atmosphere of the city was turned to a very queer kind of green twilight, as of men under the sea. The sealed and sullen sunset behind the dark dome of St. Paul's had in it smoky and sinister colours--colours of sickly green, dead red or decaying bronze, that were just bright enough to emphasise the solid whiteness of the snow. But right up against these dreary colours rose the black bulk of the cathedral; and upon the top of the cathedral was a random splash and great stain of snow, still clinging as to an Alpine peak. It had fallen accidentally, but just so fallen as to half drape the dome from its very topmost point, and to pick out in perfect silver the great orb and the cross. When Syme saw it he suddenly straightened himself, and made with his sword-stick an involuntary salute. (Chesterton, *Thursday* 125)

The colors surrounding the cathedral symbolize the decadence and nihilism of the age; they indicate nothing less than the sickness and death itself to which nihilism eventually leads. But “accidentally” a clump of snow remains on the huge dome drawing attention to its magnificence; however, it is not to the cathedral in general to which Syme is drawn; rather, Syme is confounded by the “great orb and the cross” atop the dome. Chesterton could have just as easily had Syme emerge from his labyrinth of darkness to view the Tower of London, the

English symbol of political power. Marx, no doubt, came to view the state and economics in particular as the chief determining factor of humankind; but for Chesterton, it is the cross—that “emblem of suffering and shame,” as the hymn writer states—which reorients the orb of human history.

The narrator continues, “It seemed a symbol of human faith and valour that while the skies were darkening that high place of the earth was bright. The devils might have captured heaven, but they had not yet captured the cross” (125-26). Ironically, the instrument of Roman execution becomes the sign that good cannot be defeated and that the faithful may keep struggling against the gates of Hell. Furthermore, it is important to note Syme’s involuntary act of worship upon seeing the cross. Upon being confronted with the cross of Christ, Syme involuntarily salutes with his sword-stick. It is at this moment that Syme ceases to be the pursued, and instead turns “to face his pursuer,” Professor de Worms—the German nihilist (126). Armed with the sword of faith, Syme does not retreat further but turns, ready to engage the enveloping nihilism of the age. The physical turn that Syme makes is the metaphorical turn to dialogue. Herein characters as allegorical representations of particular philosophies intersects with comic vision as a dialogizing force in the novel.

*Comic Vision as an Alternate Vision in The Man Who Was Thursday*

“In Menippean satire,” which Bakhtin describes as dialogic, “the unfettered and fantastic plots and situations all serve one goal—to put to the test and to expose ideas and ideologues” (26). As we have seen with his characters, the same is true with regard to the vision that Chesterton communicates through

his novels. Though he does not write pure satire, the various dialogizing devices of the novels coalesce to form alternate, dialogizing visions. *The Man Who Was Thursday* in particular is not a satirical work, but the same description Bakhtin gives Menippean satire applies to Chesterton's novel. The vision of his novel serves as an alternate vision in dialogue with the vision of life proclaimed by the nihilists of the *fin de siècle*. As Ostrowski notes, "The author of the book did not start from a previously assumed philosophical position. That is why the novel is not a mere illustration of a ready-made thesis, but a real debate, just like some other novels of ideas written at the beginning of the twentieth century by H. G. Wells and A. Huxley" (152). Maisie Ward notes that when *The Man Who Was Thursday* was adapted for the stage 20 years later, Chesterton said in an interview:

Associated with that merely fantastic notion was the one that there is actually a lot of good to be discovered in unlikely places, and that we who are fighting each other may be all fighting on the right side. I think it is quite true that it is just as well we do not, while the fight is on, know all about each other; the soul must be solitary, or there would be no place for courage. (168)

Yet what is the vision that Chesterton produces? *The Man Who Was Thursday* is a fantastic novel, replete with comic elements which together reveal a comic vision that Chesterton employs to enter dialogue with the nihilism with which he had so arduously wrestled in his youth, though such a reading contradicts Chesterton's own statements about the novel. After having written the novel, Chesterton reiterated the subtitle of the text, underscoring the fact that the novel was a nightmare of a radically dualistic world. Yet his admissions are somewhat contradictory themselves. In his *Autobiography* he writes that "the

point of the whole story is a nightmare of things, not as they are, but as they seemed to the young half-pessimist of the '90s" (103). Yet the day before his death, he wrote in *The Illustrated London News* that the novel was "to describe the world of wild doubt and despair which the pessimists were generally describing at that date: with just a gleam of hope in some double meaning of doubt, which even the pessimists felt in some fitful fashion" (qtd. in Chesterton, *Annotated* 281). While he declared that the novel indeed represented a nightmare of things as they seemed rather than as they were, he admits to an element of hope present in the novel nonetheless. Thus can the novel as a theodicy be read as a nightmare, while the comic vision of the novel is rightly interpreted as a distinctly Christian vision in dialogue with the pessimistic vision of the *fin de siècle*.

Indeed, it is a humorous book filled with Chestertonian paradoxes, aphorisms and witticisms, not to mention the fantastic wildness of the plot. For example, in the opening chapter of the book, the narrator states concerning the women gathered at the party in Saffron Park, "Most of the women were of the kind vaguely called emancipated, and professed some protest against male supremacy. Yet these new women would always pay to a man the extravagant compliment which no ordinary woman ever pays to him, that of listening while he is talking" (36). Chesterton humorously points to a notable inconsistency in the feminist political movement emerging at that time. Particularly, Chesterton's wit shines through in the character of Gabriel Syme. When Syme and the spectacled Dr. Bull are seeking to entrap Wednesday, Syme develops an exquisite catechetical means: "I shall approach. Before taking off his hat, I shall take off

my own. I shall say, ‘The Marquis de Saint Eustache, I believe.’ He will say, ‘The celebrated Mr. Syme, I presume.’ He will say in the most exquisite French, ‘How are you?’ I shall reply in the most exquisite Cockney, ‘Oh, just the Syme—’ (167). The juxtaposition of languages and the pun are perspicuously clever.

Chesterton is funny, and the novel also follows the genre of comedy, especially its ending. For Gabriel and Gregory’s sister, Rosamond, are reunited; love, marriage, domesticity are on the horizon. Indeed, the novel is comic in that it ends with the prospect of marriage; however, if *Thursday* consisted solely of funny passages and ended with the prospect of marriage, at best it would be a shallow comedy, perhaps even a sort of *humour noir*; however, Chesterton employs a humorous tone and comedic ending as means to his comic end, rather than as the end in itself. Chesterton, as we will see, like the Gospels, declares a radical reversal that is the content of his comic vision.

We have already seen how Chesterton employed Wren’s orb and cross to comic ends. The second great symbol that Chesterton employs is the cross and flame of the ancient, ecclesiastical lantern. Toward the end of the novel when the double agents are being pursued in France by the Secretary, before he reveals himself to be a double agent as well, the men flock to Dr. Renard’s house in hopes of securing a motor-car as a means of speedy escape. When the Secretary is thrown from his horse and darkness begins to envelop the agents, they realize their need for light. The Colonel searches the car for a light and finds “a heavy, old-fashioned carved iron lantern with a light inside it. It was obviously an antique, and it would seem as if its original use had been in some way semi-religious, for there was rude moulding of a cross upon one of its sides” (203).



The chase continues; and in their fear, the solidarity of the double agents begins to crumble. It is in the midst of this scene that Syme and Dr. Bull confess their hope in the man in the dark room. Shortly after their confession, Syme and the Secretary meet face to face. Brandishing a broken sword and the ancient lantern, Syme shrieks at the Secretary, still believing him to be an anarchist:

“Do you see this lantern?” cried Syme in a terrible voice. “Do you see the cross carved on it, and the flame inside? You did not make it. You did not light it. Better men than you, men would could believe and obey, twisted the entrails of iron and preserved the legend of fire. There is not a street you walk on, there is not a thread you wear, that was not made as this lantern was, by denying your philosophy of dirt and rats. You can make nothing. You can only destroy. You will destroy mankind; you will destroy the world. Let that suffice you. Yet this one old Christian lantern you shall not destroy. It shall go where your empire of apes will never have the wit to find it.” (Chesterton, *Thursday* 217)

What had remained implicit when Syme viewed the orb and the cross of St. Paul’s becomes explicit with the cross of the lantern. The cross is melded within the lantern thus making them one thing. The cross is what gives Syme light and clears the darkness of nihilism. In the cross he finds an emblem that will outshine the darkness of the philosophy of nihilism, the philosophy of dirt and rats. Yet this does not occur in isolation but in the dialogue between Syme and the Secretary, whom Syme still believes to be an anarchist. Once again, the reader must transpose the actual dialogue between Syme and the Secretary to the dialogue between Gabriel Syme and Lucian Gregory which occurs metaphorically throughout the novel. The philosophy espoused by Lucian Gregory is manufactured in isolation; Syme’s philosophy is forged in the cauldron of community, in dialogue itself.

The final and most revealing moment in this novel is found in the final revelation of Sunday's suffering. In the final chapter of the novel, Lucian Gregory reappears to accuse the "seven angels of heaven" of having never "suffered for one hour of real agony" (262). Gabriel Syme responds to Gregory stating:

No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, "We also have suffered."

It is not true that we have never been broken. We have been broken upon the wheel. It is not true that we have never descended from these thrones. We have descended into hell. (Chesterton, *Thursday* 262-3)

Syme truly believes that he now understands. Surely Syme is right to say that they have descended from their thrones into the dark labyrinth of evil; however, he thinks that his own confusion and suffering are in some way salvific. Seeming to have forgotten the cross and the orb and the Christian lantern, Syme believes that he can now fully understand Lucian's anarchy because Syme has himself suffered through the nightmare which is the plot of the novel. But in the middle of Syme's dialogue with Gregory, the voice of Sunday thunders loudly. In fact, it is Syme's own confession that prompts Sunday's great climactic confession. As Chesterton later says, he pulls off his mask at this point to reveal the words of Christ, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" (263). Syme sees that it is Sunday's suffering that is redemptive and that Lucian Gregory, standing apart from the difficult struggle with evil, is the truly isolated one, the one who has not suffered.

The statement is obviously a quotation of Jesus' own words, a response given to the sons of Zebedee, James and John. The tenth chapter of Mark's gospel records Jesus' journey to Jerusalem with his disciples. Along the way,

Jesus predicted his own suffering and death: “Behold we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again” (33-34). But like Gabriel Syme, James and John do not understand; expecting a glorious kingdom, the two disciples ask for seats of honor to which Jesus responds with the question repeated by Sunday. The implication is clear. It is the suffering and death of the Messiah that will bring redemption to his people. What appears to be final defeat and thus a fate to be avoided is instead reversed to reveal the comedy of redemption.

With his stunning query, Sunday identifies himself with Christ; and Syme along with Chesterton’s readers now fully understand that it is only through the incarnate Suffering Servant that life can be fully understood. As David Leigh writes “What had happened in the search to be an arbitrary pantheistic God behind human suffering becomes not merely the transcendent God of the Sabbath but at the same time the incarnate God of the cup of sorrows” (334). Through the character of Gabriel Syme, Chesterton is consciously playing the *jongleur de Dieu* who can laugh in the face of suffering not because the world is meaningless and absurd but because God has intervened into human affairs through the person of Jesus Christ and has reversed the worst of fates.

*Dialogism in The Ball and the Cross, Manalive, and The Napoleon of Notting Hill*

Similarly to *The Man Who Was Thursday*, *The Ball and the Cross* has its own dialogical context—the Blatchford Affair which has already been discussed in

chapter one. Chesterton carried on a quite public debate with Robert Blatchford, editor of the *Clarion* on the subject of free will. The debate issued in the publication of *Heretics* and eventually in the publication of the positive expression of Chesterton's beliefs, *Orthodoxy*. *The Ball and the Cross* is, in some ways, the whole affair reworked fictionally. As Martin Gardner writes, "There is no doubt, however, that *The Ball and the Cross*, which Chesterton wrote only a year after his battle with Blatchford, is a comic portrayal of that battle with real swords taking the place of verbal thrusts" (38). *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* also has a specific dialogical context—the Boer War upon which Chesterton commented at length in his newspaper essays (Ward 153). But it also has as its context the growing loneliness of the modern city. As Jefferson Hunter writes, "The best Edwardian phrases for loneliness were Chesterton's: 'this horrible silence of modernity. . . this strange indifference, this strange dreamy egotism, this strange loneliness of millions in a crowd.' He hated the loneliness of the city and fought it in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* by imposing on the city a fantastic transformation" (228-29). *Manalive* has no specific biographical context of dialogue but nonetheless possesses a dialogical style.

Polyglot language is not limited to *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* but appears throughout the various other novels under examination. We could examine a passage from all of the representative novels to exhibit their polyglot language, but we are interested to see how Chesterton employs it to his own particular ends.<sup>6</sup> Dale Alquist describes *The Ball and the Cross* as "full of

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<sup>6</sup>See Appendix A for an outline of *The Ball and the Cross*.

debates [. . . a] fine, uneven, annoying work, packed with poetry and farce.” Ian Boyd says of the novel that “the interruptions are more important than the duel they interrupt” (*Novels* 21). Dialogue itself again dominates the narrative, and the voices of the characters blend with the voice of the narrator and occasional authorial intrusions into the text. There are even two “lyrical meditations” included in the text, thus confirming Bakhtin’s theory of multiple styles coalescing into one (149). Specifically in this novel, the use of polyglot language is again inseparable from the meaning itself. At the conclusion of the novel, the main characters do not dismiss one another’s philosophy so much as confess that their own philosophies, which have been in constant dialogue throughout the novel, cannot stand without the other. The dialogue must continue, therefore, in the life of the readers. Similarly, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* blends multitudinous styles of writing.<sup>7</sup> Dialogue emerges as the dominant form of communication in the novel, but there are also a greater number of authorial intrusions, not altogether surprising for an writer’s first novel. Like *The Man Who Was Thursday*, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* begins with a poem, but the first chapter of the earlier novel is narrated almost entirely by the voice of the author, while the narrator’s voice is heard undisturbed in the second chapter, at which time the main characters also begin to speak.

There is, however, a use of dialogue that remains unique to this novel. Chesterton both employs and parodies journalese. Its inclusion establishes Chesterton’s conscious toying with styles. When King Quin embeds himself as a journalist in the conflict between Quin’s men and Notting Hill, he tests various

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<sup>7</sup>See Appendix A for an outline of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*.

styles to “see if they had the pure journalistic flavour” (Book IV, Chapter II). His initial attempt reads, “FROM THE FRONT. GENERAL BUCK DEFEATED. DARKNESS, DANGER, AND DEATH. WAYNE SAID TO BE IN PUMP STREET. FEELING IN THE CITY” (Book IV, Chapter II). But not satisfied, he continues his test. “WAYNE'S WONDERFUL VICTORY” (Book IV, Chapter II). Satirizing Chesterton’s own proclivity for alliterations, Quin states, “I suppose we couldn't say ‘wictory’. . . ‘Wayne's wonderful wictory’? No, no. Refinement, Pally, refinement. I have it.” “WAYNE WINS. ASTOUNDING FIGHT IN THE DARK” (Book IV, Chapter II).

He then attempts to write from the perspective of an “eye-witness,” still testing various styles for their journalistic merit. “At the side of one experiment was written, ‘Try American style,’ and the fragment began: ‘The King must go. We want gritty men. Flapdoodle is all very...;’ and then broke off, followed by the note, ‘Good sound journalism safer. Try it.’” His example of “good journalism” begins, “The greatest of English poets has said that a rose by any...” but is followed by an “annotation at the side [that] was almost undecipherable, but seemed to be something like: ‘How about old Steevens and the mot juste? E.g. . . .’” (Book IV, Chapter II). Such parodying of various journalistic styles further suggests Chesterton’s intentional use of polyglot languages to a dialogical end.

In *Manalive*, Chesterton adds epistolary dialogue to his rhetoric of styles.<sup>8</sup> As Boyd notes, “it is the evidence presented to the court which enables the book to acquire the form of an epistolary novel. Instead of letters written by

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<sup>8</sup>See Appendix A for outline of *Manalive*.

the hero himself, the court deals with letters written about the hero by hostile acquaintances and understanding friends” (*Novels* 54). Herein lies a unique coalescing of styles. The voice of the main character, Innocent Smith, while put under judgment through the voices of various other characters in epistolary form, retains its distinctive character. So in order to understand Innocent Smith, the reader must interpret his voice through that of other characters, not in conversational mode but in formal, written language. Boyd adds that “the epistolary form suggests [. . .] that Smith is never in any serious danger, but that in a sense he is never really being judged. It is not he, but the people who are judging him who are on trial” (*Novels* 55). Yet the reader will judge not only the various epistlers but also Smith himself. As in all of Chesterton’s novels, the dialogue is conducted not only intertextually but also with the readers.

Perhaps most obviously, but not least importantly, the resolution of the conflicting philosophies in the novels establishes a dialogizing style. In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and *The Ball and the Cross*, no one philosophy (character) wins out over another. This is well-established in Chestertonian criticism. Of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Boyd writes, “What the novel finally implies is that this conflict, which is the source of the entire action of the novel, can only be resolved by the common man who possesses the balance which both Quin and Wayne lack” (*Novels* 20). As Russell Kirk puts it, “The satirist and the fanatic Quin and Wayne, come to understand at the end that the two of them are mad—but only because they are two lobes of a brain that had been riven in two” (36). And Lynette Hunter states, “The novel [*The Napoleon of Notting Hill*] not only makes clear that the two types of artistic

men are valuable, but also points out that both are potentially misleading” (“Reading” 120).

Likewise, Boyd writes concerning *The Ball and the Cross* that the resolution of the novel “underlines the danger of the separation of religion [MacIan] and rationalism [Turnbull]” (*Novels* 22). Similarly *The Man Who Was Thursday* ends with more ambiguity than resolution: Sunday’s haunting question is left unanswered. As Russell Carlin notes, at the beginning of the novel “Gregory views his world through one perspective—through the need for anarchy and chaos. Syme is like Gregory in that he also sees the world through one perspective. His perspective, however, is the opposite of Gregory’s” (28). But by the end of the novel, Syme has gained a new perspective. “He no longer looks at the world in one direction; he can see more” (Carlin 29). This is of course not to suggest the merits of absolutely open-ended dialogue. The symbolism of each of the novels clearly points to the advance of Christianity but not to the exclusion of opposing viewpoints. In other words, in this tournament of narratives, Christianity ultimately wins according to Chesterton but not monologically, for Christianity according to Chesterton is large enough to encompass various aspects of other perspectives without silencing them. Chesterton remains open to the other even while arguing for a particular point of view. As Kingsley Amis writes, “if the outcome of the battle is never in doubt, the enemy is allowed some not always ineffectual return fire. [. . .] This interest in dialogue as against monologue comes out strongly in the third novel, *The Ball and the Cross*” (“Four” 36). As Hal G. P. Colebatch says of the two characters in *The Napoleon of*



*Notting Hill*, “They have been incomplete: each alone is maimed and destructive, but between them create a whole” (442).

Similarly in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Chesterton confesses the goodness of creation over and against, on the one hand, a materialistic philosophy that denies the existence of God and, on the other hand, a nihilistic philosophy which eventually denies anything but the self. As Knight writes, “he affirms the doctrine of Creation by declaring that Notting Hill is good merely by virtue of its existence” (“G. K. Chesterton and the Cross” 3). This is an important theme throughout Chesterton’s oeuvre that is given imaginative voice in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. It should be of little concern to the Protestant reader that Chesterton’s focus is so often on Creation and Incarnation instead of Redemption, for as Knight states, “Ultimately, Chesterton responded to a broken world by reminding it of its original splendor” (“G. K.” 7). This is consistent with Chesterton’s essentially Catholic vision wherein “the Crucifixion and its salvific content takes its place in a constellation of doctrine: Creation, the Incarnation, the Church, and the sacraments” (“G. K.” 6).

The comic vision of *The Ball and the Cross* is the most overt of the four novels under examination. The title alone has religious implications and the primary discussion in the novel centers upon a theological subject. The ending is almost saccharine—“there among the ashes lay two shining things that had survived the fire, his sword and Turnbull’s, fallen haphazard in the pattern of a cross”; but the vision of the novel is not without surprise (258). As Boyd notes, “In *The Ball and the Cross*, the quarrel between MacIan and Turnbull dramatizes the conflict between romantic Christianity and revolutionary Socialism, and is

finally resolved by an affirmation of the values which each one represents” (“Philosophy in Fiction” 52). The reverse side of Chesterton’s rejection of both Impressionism and Calvinism—their narrowing of the imagination—is expressed thematically in this novel (Fagerberg 15).<sup>9</sup> Only Christianity, and specifically for Chesterton only Roman Catholicism, can encompass the world and not be destroyed by it. As Coates notes, “Turnbull and MacIan are not consciously or unconsciously seeking some compromise which will adjust their respective portions of truth into a harmonious, if diluted, whole. Chesterton did not find compromise or synthesis compelling either imaginatively or intellectually. Rather, the two men are engaged in exploring their roles in the story and in exploring the story itself” (“The Ball and the Cross” 74). This dialogical conclusion that encapsulates the theme of the novel is consistent with the other novels as well. “In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Auberon’s irony and Wayne’s fanaticism are finally revealed as the two essentials of political sanity which achieve their equilibrium in the Chestertonian common man” (Boyd “Philosophy in Fiction” 52). Similarly, “[I]n *Manalive*, Innocent Smith derives a kind of cumulative wisdom from the various political types whom he meets in his journey around the world” (Boyd, “Philosophy in Fiction” 52). In all four novels, therefore style meets substance. That Chesterton’s meaning cannot be fully extracted from his style suggests that the way forward is through dialogue. With reference to *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Knight writes, “By recognizing the presence of another person, conversation offers a form of defense against

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<sup>9</sup>See also John Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (Hull, England: Hull UP, 1984).

solipsism” (*Chesterton and Evil* 126). Thus does Chesterton offer dialogue as a rejoinder to the nihilism he detected at Slade, as the essence of his comic vision, and as the essence of his imaginative style.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Chesterton and the Great Tradition: The Dialogical Style of Chesterton's Literary Criticism

#### *Introduction*

In his own time, Gilbert Keith Chesterton made a name for himself as a literary critic. In fact, his literary biographies were so well-received that he was offered a professorship at Birmingham University on account of them, an offer he refused in order to pursue his journalistic vocation (Dale 418). His *Robert Browning* (1906), *Charles Dickens* (1910), and *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913) are considered his best books; but he also wrote and published critical essays, many of them book-length, each of them devoted to the following cultural, literary, political, and religious figures: William Blake, Thomas Carlyle, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Cobbett, St. Francis of Assisi, Lord Kitchener, George Bernard Shaw, Robert Louis Stevenson, Alfred Lord Tennyson, William Thackeray, St. Thomas Aquinas, Leo Tolstoy, and G. F. Watts. This is not to mention the countless shorter essays included in his essay collections that offered critiques of such figures as Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Lewis Carroll, Henry James, Samuel Johnson, Walter de la Mare, William Morris, John Henry Newman, Savonarola, Sir Walter Scott, Mark Twain, and Walt Whitman; and the list goes on and on.

Chesterton's reputation as a literary critic has varied widely since its initial reception. As mentioned, the faculty at Birmingham University thought so highly of his critical insights that they offered him a professorship; however, not

everyone agreed. When the Home University Library of Modern Knowledge published *The Victorian Age in Literature*, the editors added the following subscript on the first page: “The editors wish to explain that this book is not put forward as an authoritative history of Victorian literature. It is a free and personal statement of views and impressions about the significance of Victorian literature made by Mr. Chesterton at the Editors’ express invitation” (423). Thus did the editors see fit to include Chesterton’s criticism in their Home Library collection, but only with a caveat suggesting the non-scholarly nature of the work. Though not referring specifically to his literary criticism, Bernard Shaw’s comments regarding Chesterton apply to the widespread perception concerning his literary criticism: “Mr. Chesterton tells and prints the most extravagant lies. He takes ordinary incidents of human life—common middle-class life—and gives them a monstrous and strange and gigantic outline” (Chesterton, *Do We Agree?* 541). By contrast, W. H. Auden wrote several years later that “Chesterton’s literary criticism abounds in such observations which, once they have been made, seem so obviously true that one cannot understand why one had not seen them for oneself. [. . .] But Chesterton interests himself with the ‘obvious’ matters of literary criticism and was the first critic to see many of these things. As a literary critic, therefore, I rank him very high” (15). Because Chesterton does not interest himself with the pedantic matters with which many critics are consumed, he will never rate very highly among the critics; however, like much else deemed unimportant by the critics, Chesterton’s criticism remains significant.

*Criticism of Chesterton's Criticism*

Many of the weaknesses and strengths of Chesterton's approach are quite apparent. Many of the weaknesses Chesterton himself confessed. Concerning *Stevenson*, he clearly stated that "this is not a biographical study" (45). When he wrote *Chaucer*, he admitted that he did not have the "eye for detail" that is a prerequisite of the successful biographer, and he admits that he has reworked quotations of Chaucer no doubt to the dislike of Chaucerians (221, 315). Of his criticism of Shaw, he wrote, "I am much too interested in what he really means to bother myself about everything that he merely says" (588). William Furlong points to further weaknesses in Chesterton's Shavian criticism. Shaw himself, Furlong notes, "cited 'howlers' from G.K.C.'s book including an unfortunate misquotation from *Major Barbara* which led Chesterton to a glaring misinterpretation. Then he ticked off factual errors which had marred G.K.C.'s account—errors about the subject's early life in Ireland, errors about the subject's parents, even errors about the tipping tendencies of the subject's father" (46). Shaw exploited these errors to avoid confronting everything Chesterton got right.

Unfortunately, Chesterton had a reputation for such carelessness. Sylvere Monad adds, "Scholarship demands what Chesterton did not possess: care and technical expertness. But it can hardly be called in question that Chesterton possessed what scholarship—fortunately for most of us—does not demand: genius" (113). Gertrude White expresses a similar concern: "The chief failing of his method is that, despite his professed emphasis on the concrete and the importance of the particular, he too often ignored particulars for generalities, and the light he sheds tends to be diffuse rather than focused" (433). In "Chesterton

as Literary Critic,” David Derus finds that Chesterton causes “authors [to] fit the preconceived Chestertonian pattern”(103). Similarly, Monad suggests that “Chesterton wanted Dickens to ‘understand’ wine, because he wanted him to be a little more like Chesterton than he actually was” (484). Such is the general critique leveled against Chesterton’s criticism.

However, because his generalizations so often get straight to the heart of an author, his critical work must not be dismissed. As John Gross points out, Chesterton’s criticism does the task which all criticism ought to do—it draws the reader to the primary authors themselves (222-3). Alvan Ryan puts a positive spin on Chesterton’s hasty manner suggesting that more often than not his “broad generalizations” work effectively (vii). Samuel Hynes suggests that Chesterton was capable of such a style because “he believed in something else [other than criticism]. If he was witty and epigrammatic, it was in order that deep beliefs might be well and pungently expressed; and if he was illogical and paradoxical, it was because the world did not strike him as logical, but as a great Impossibility, a miracle” (86). Furlong also looks beyond the admitted weaknesses to the strengths of Chesterton’s criticism. “Straight biography was simply not G.K.C.’s metier, and he never attempted to write one about G.B.S. or anyone else. [. . .] One does not look into Chesterton for biographical detail [. . .] One does look into Chesterton to learn from a genius of insight the mind” of whomever he is examining (49). Indeed, his style is at once superior to criticism of our own day, because Chesterton “believed in something else” beside criticism, but also full of inherent weaknesses that threaten to unravel the whole (Hynes 86).

The more important matter of Chesterton's criticism remains to be evaluated. Chesterton's theological assumptions at work in his criticism have been viewed both positively and negatively. While generally positive of Chesterton's theological criticism, John Coates sees a shift in Chesterton's later criticism, turning from true literary concerns to "theology and politics" ("Chesterton as Literary" 2). But an examination of his earliest work reveals that all of Chesterton's theological criticism is present, at least in seminal form, from the beginning. David Derus views such a fusion of the religious and literary in a mixed light. "[H]is is an instrument keyed to special purpose. Apologetics and propaganda, yes; popular criticism, yes. But in the act also an instrument tuned to a higher pitch, that visionary and prophetic role which cuts across particular areas of interest to call the reader back, in emotional emphatic terms, to the largest verities" ("Chesterton Style" 52). Likewise, Richard Vorhees writes, "Chesterton took undue note of the morality of a literary work. [. . .] But he certainly believed that it was the business of the critic to discuss both the morality and the esthetics of a work" (249). Later in his assessment, Coates tempers his earlier judgment stating, "For him, literary criticism cannot be divorced from the widest questions of meaning and value facing his contemporaries" ("Chesterton as Literary" 9).

At its best, Chesterton's literary criticism has been shown to be consistent with his theological vision. At its worst, his criticism has been labeled propagandist; however, to judge him on his own terms, all writing is propaganda according to Chesterton. Thus, one might dismiss his criticism on a couple of counts. Firstly, some will no doubt reject the criticism as sheer propaganda; but



to do this is to reject everything including one's own opinions. Alternatively, some might find his criticism to be overly subjective, given his theological interests. In fact, White says as much, "Chesterton himself tells us, in his book on Chaucer, that he is concerned with the impact of a particular writer on a particular person. That is, he claims his critical approach is essentially subjective, the attempt merely to account for his own experience in relation to the work of the writer" (424). In a similar vein, Monad describes his criticism as "impressionistic" (71).

Chesterton would have been appalled that some have labeled his criticism as subjective and impressionistic, for he battled against the Impressionists most vigorously. His criticism is subjective and impressionistic only in that he relates it to his broader theological vision—one that many share. As Coates has indicated, "It is clear. . .that Chesterton felt an artist should not be concerned with an 'impression', a perfect moment, an aspect, but should rather attempt to engage the deepest levels of man's consciousness, providing a form for the vast unknown pattern of perception or knowledge which exist there" (*Chesterton and the Edwardian* 201). This is precisely what his criticism does.

### *Criticism and Dialogical Style*

Despite the breadth and depth of his literary criticism, Chesterton's criticism today is largely ignored, though it did receive a sort of revival of interest in the 1970s. Scholarly notice of Chesterton's criticism is largely confined to the *Chesterton Review*, a non-peer-reviewed publication of the G. K. Chesterton Society; in other words, most of the critical attention that Chesterton's criticism

has received recently has been directed toward audiences already familiar with and sympathetic to G.K.C. Overlooked by critics of Chesterton's oeuvre is the dialogical style inherent in his works, even his literary criticism. Especially helpful to describe and define dialogical style is the literary theory of Russian theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, as examined and summarized in chapter one. Bakhtin posits that, with the advent of the novel, traditional stylistics must expand to include the dialogical word. He makes important distinctions between the epic and the novel; a definitive, finished word on the one hand, and a dialogical, open-ended word on the other. Bakhtin writes that "no living word relates to its object in a *singular* way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate" (276).

Dialogical stylistics recognizes that one word stands in relation to many other words. The theological metaphor of such discourse employed by James McClendon is that of a "tournament of narratives." As Ralph C. Wood contends,

We are formed by the particular stories that constitute particular traditions. Christians claim no other transcendent perspective, therefore, than the one provided in the self-identification of God through the Jews and Jesus Christ [. . . T]he pluralistic moment in which we live offers Christians a distinctive and enabling opportunity to demonstrate the real character of our faith. [. . . ] Our task is to articulate the Christian story as it confronts and engages other accounts of the true and the good and the beautiful. (*Contending* 119-20)

Such a dialogical style seems to be employed by Chesterton in his many debates, verbal and oral. He does not offer a definitive last word, so much as he joins the conversation, the dialogue, with a position that is open to further discussion and

refinement. However as Chesterton famously quips, “I am incurably convinced that the object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid” (*Autobiography* 212). Even though Chesterton’s dialogical style is not as completely open-ended as Bakhtin’s theory seems to be, a dialogical style seems to be nonetheless at work in his literary criticism as we have already seen in his imaginative works.

Additionally, Chesterton is aware that he enters the conversation with certain philosophical assumptions. In fact, Chesterton is almost post-modern in his willingness to confess his own philosophical stance, to admit that it is a reformed version of Victorian optimism and to declare that it goes against the pessimism that succeeded Victorian optimism, and to confess that this is the interpretive lens through which he engages with the Great Tradition of Western Literature.<sup>1</sup> Chesterton’s literary criticism is indeed an outworking or literary application of his theological vision; more specifically, Chesterton’s literary criticism is a continuation of that dialogue between Christianity and contemporary artistic trends and philosophies begun at Slade. As he writes in *The Victorian Age of Literature*, “There can be no art without morality” (415). It becomes the task of the critic then not only to evaluate the art of the artist, but also to dialogue with the philosophies inhering in the artistic creation. In other words, Chesterton’s oeuvre, and specifically his literary criticism, is best read not as a monological, absolute word about artistic style but as a word in dialogue, in relationship to the Great Tradition itself and the current literary criticism and

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<sup>1</sup>By Great Tradition I mean what has historically constituted the Western canon of literature, albeit a fluid construction subject to change at any given moment in literary history. This is distinguished from the Great Tradition of Western theology to which Chesterton also appeals.

artistic trends of his own day. Again, this is not to suggest that Chesterton is a relativist—far from it. Any cursory reading of Chesterton reveals that this is not so. Rather to engage the philosophy of the art and the artist himself suggests that “the other has been granted equal status with his or her creator” (Wood, “Flannery” 60). Such a dialogical style is not by definition relativistic but relational; which is to define his style as intrinsically Christian. As David Lyle Jeffrey has written, the “Christian literary tradition” traceable through Augustine “painfully eludes any theory of literature or culture which preoccupies itself with strategies of past or present for aggrandizement of the self, for ‘empowerment’ and hence for suppression of the Other” (381). In this sense, Chesterton’s style is intrinsically “charitable” and thus Christian.

#### *Chesterton’s Own Statements about His Criticism*

Though some authors delight in misleading their audience with their own confessional statements about their work, Chesterton proves trustworthy, at least in this regard, even he also recognizes the biographical fallacy. Writing about critical interest in the details of Chaucer’s biography, Chesterton states, “This sort of hunting for hints is wonderfully exciting and very profitable and edifying—in murder-stories. But it is not human: and it has no relation to real human life” (*Chaucer* 222). Rather he argues that imaginative literature does not spring from the linear events of the poet’s life but out of “what he thought when he was doing nothing; not out of the self that he expressed in working or wiving or flirting, but out of the self that he could only express in writing” (*Chaucer* 224). Again in *G. F. Watts* he writes that the “innermost that the biographer could discover, after

all possible creepings and capers, would be what Watts in his inmost soul believes, and that Watts has splashed on twenty feet of canvas and given to the nation for nothing” (Watts 30). In *The Thing: Why I Am a Catholic*, one of his later works, Chesterton addresses similar charges that his writing was riddled with Catholicism:

A Catholic putting Catholicism into a novel, or a song, or a sonnet, or anything else, is not being a propagandist; he is simply being a Catholic. Everybody understands this about every other enthusiasm in the world. [. . .] Personally, I am all for propaganda; and a great deal of what I write is deliberately propagandist. But even when it is not in the least propagandist, it will probably be full of the implications of my own religion; because that is what is meant by having a religion. (225)

Chesterton understands the integrative nature of religious belief; it is not something that can easily be compartmentalized but rather influences a person in every way. Furthermore, Christianity, specifically, does not limit the mind of the artist but expands it. As he writes of Chaucer, “his theology was a thing that broadened his mind. It brought him into contact with the great minds like Dante and Aquinas; it linked up his country with all Europe; it even referred him backwards to the greatest sages of pagan antiquity” (368). The Christian vision engages the world around it rather than ignoring or avoiding it.

“Worldview” is the fashionable term of the day for this vision of reality that encompasses non-religious philosophies, though it is a term limited in its capacity as well.<sup>2</sup> Chesterton admits that his Christian and particularly Roman Catholic tradition provides the interpretive lens through which he sees

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<sup>2</sup>As Ralph C. Wood has pointed out, the term *worldview* suggests that the person subscribing to one stands outside of the world to view it; necessarily one’s philosophy of life or worldview cannot be separate from one’s interaction with the world. Hence his preference for *tradition* as a better term, for one stands *within* a tradition as a way of life that has been literally handed down from one generation to the next.

everything; but Chesterton also realizes that this basic concept is just as true of the irreligious as it is of the religious person:

[T]his world of today does not know that all the novels and newspapers that it reads or writes are in fact full of certain assumptions, that are just as dogmatic as dogmas. [. . .] But the point about these assumptions, true or false, is that they are left as being assumed, or alluded to, or taken naturally as they come. They are not felt as being preached; and therefore they are not called propaganda. Yet they have in practice all the double character of propaganda; they involve certain views with which everyone does not agree; and they do in fact spread those views by means of fiction and popular literature. (*Thing* 228-29)

Some propagandize, while others preach, Chesterton claims. In his study of Watts, Chesterton calls his art a form of preaching, writing that Watts had “the audacious faculty of mounting a pulpit” (Watts 14). Even so, Chesterton argues that in this Watts was “a hundred times more broad-minded and more right than the new ultra-technical school” because he believed that “art must be linked to life” (17).

What he labels propaganda or preaching might better and less pejoratively be labeled argument. As the title of a recent secular composition textbook proclaims, “Everything’s an Argument.” This is what concerns Chesterton, the argument or (as he also says) the philosophy of an author. And even more precisely, he is concerned in his literary criticism with the theology of an author. As he states in “Second Thoughts on Shaw” that was later added to his book *George Bernard Shaw*, “I am interested in basic things like theology. And in practice every man is a theologian, even when he is not a theist” (590). Furthermore, he is forthright about the necessity of understanding the context of the artist. Concerning Watts, he writes, “Splendid as is the art of Watts

technically or obviously considered, we shall yet find much in it to perplex and betray us, unless we understand his original theory and intention, a theory and intention dyed deeply with the colours of a great period which is gone” (Watts 11). Since a work of art is linked to life itself and to the philosophy of the author, it cannot be rightly understood apart from the context which produced it. This in itself dialogically challenges the art for art’s sake movement.

What Chesterton foresees is the post-modern reality that all seeing is “lensed” seeing. According to his definition, everything ever written might very well constitute propaganda—his writings included (we call it not propaganda but argument or bias or assumptions or presuppositions). Thus do we see the dialogical goal of Chesterton’s task— the task of the literary critic in addition to assessing the formal qualities of the artwork must also unmask the underlying assumptions of the work of art and to test their veracity. He sees that every historical epoch espouses a philosophy of life. The weakness of the nineteenth century, Chesterton declares in *Watts* is that “it did not fall back, as we do, on things yet more sold and definite, upon art and wine and high finance and industrial efficiency and vices. It fell in love with abstractions and became enamoured of great and desolate words” (13). Even so, art cannot be reduced to a moral lesson. Some critics labeled the paintings of Watts didactic and dismissed them, but Chesterton suggests that art can never be reduced to a lesson, that a story can never be reduced to a moral, for only “facts or the physical sciences” can constitute a lesson. At the same time, this does not diminish the moral quality of art which is “only unmoral in so far as most morality is immoral” (*Watts* 57). In

other words, all art, while not reducible to its philosophy, nonetheless contains a philosophy inseparable from the artistry itself.

*The Connection to Criticism*

Writing in his *Autobiography* shortly before his death, Chesterton applied these ideas specifically to his first attempt at literary criticism:

I will not say that I wrote a book on Browning; but I wrote a book on love, liberty, poetry, my own views on God and religion (highly undeveloped), and various theories of my own optimism and pessimism and the hope of the world; a book in which the name of Browning was introduced from time to time [. . .]. There were very few biographical facts in the book, and those were nearly all wrong. But there is something buried somewhere in the book; though I think it is rather my boyhood than Browning's biography. (101)

The twenty-first century reader must remember that it was the publication of *Robert Browning* in 1906 that established Chesterton as a first-rate literary critic. But critics of Chesterton's criticism, then and now, have used this passage against him, claiming that Chesterton approached criticism with a predetermined archetype for literary analysis. Admittedly, this poses a difficulty for the critics of his criticism: if the author makes such an admission, why should the Browning reader bother? It would seem that Chesterton denies his own credibility as a scholar. Rather, it seems that Chesterton honestly advises his readers of the concerns of his criticism. Here he is almost post-modern *avant la lettre*, describing to his audience the lenses through which he views his subject. Chesterton's comments concerning his task with Robert Louis Stevenson are similarly instructive. He plainly rejects psychoanalytical criticism for theological interpretation in the opening pages of the work, confessing that he is "especially



interested not only in the literature left by the man but in the philosophy inhering in the literature” (49).

Chesterton admits that his chief concern is “the philosophy inhering in the literature,” thus linking himself with most other serious readers of the great texts. Yet Chesterton does not simply distill philosophy from art. In fact, it might come as a surprise, given the preceding confessions, that much of *Robert Browning* sought to recover the art of Browning which had been lost to a preoccupation with his philosophy. Chesterton defends Browning as an artist of great achievement, paying particular attention to his style and his use of the grotesque as a literary device. He writes, “No criticism of Browning’s poems can be vital, none in the face of the poems themselves can be even intelligible, which is not based upon the fact that he was successfully or otherwise a conscious and deliberate artist” (136). Furthermore, Chesterton condemns those who seek only to pilfer from Browning his “message” while ignoring his art: “The great fault of most of the appreciation of Browning lies in the fact that it conceives the moral and artistic value of his work to lie in what is called ‘the message of Browning,’ or the ‘the teaching of Browning,’ or, in other words, in the mere opinions of Browning” (177). Against this, Chesterton suggests the sheer originality of Browning’s poetry. “Browning,” Chesterton argues, “no sooner had a new idea than he tried to make a new form to express it” (136). Elsewhere, Chesterton writes that “The truth about Browning is not that he was indifferent to technical beauty, but that he invented a particular kind of technical beauty to which any one else is free to be as indifferent as he chooses” (138). While art might seem to

be of less interest to Chesterton than the “philosophy inhering in the literature,” he does not separate the two but shows how the two actually work together.

In particular, Chesterton connects Browning’s use of the grotesque to his meaning, noting that “it is the supreme function of the philosopher of the grotesque to make the world stand on its head that people may look at it” (151). This reminds the reader of Flannery O’Connor’s use of the grotesque and is not unrelated from Chesterton’s own use of paradox as a literary device. This philosophy which Chesterton detects in Browning’s use of the grotesque is a philosophy of optimism, but an optimism older than Victorian optimism. “Browning's optimism was not founded on opinions which were the work of Browning, but on life which was the work of God,” he declares (179-80). One immediately perceives the affinity between Chesterton’s *Browning* and his *Orthodoxy*. Though Chesterton was a practicing Anglican at the time he wrote *Orthodoxy*, his theological vision was already essentially Roman Catholic. As David Fagerberg notes in *The Size of Chesterton’s Catholicism*, “Chesterton’s journey was an essentially Catholic one at every point because he found in Catholicism the perfection of the truth, beauty, and goodness to which he had been led by his own exploration of the world. The Church to which he finally espouses himself does not avoid that world, or ask the Christian to avoid it” (15). This is the essence of *Orthodoxy*—that the perfection Chesterton sought in this world could be found only in Christianity. His later theological treatise, *Everlasting Man*, would make the Roman Catholic implications explicit. The connection to Browning and dialogue follows: Chesterton sees himself in

Browning; he lauds Browning's refusal to silence the world around him but to engage it instead.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Chesterton praises Charles Dickens for his philosophy of optimism. In 1903, Chesterton published the first of many essays on Charles Dickens, followed in 1906 by a book-length literary biography of Dickens. Concerning Chesterton's Dickens's publications, Sylvere Monad writes, "One needs no excuse for presenting Chesterton as the most important figure in Dickens studies 1900-1920, though one might hesitate to claim that he is a major figure now" (111). This is to underscore the fact that Chesterton's interpretation of Dickens was well-received. Similar to his work on Browning, this was another work of recovery. Dickens's popularity had begun to wane; but Chesterton magnificently rescued his reputation, extending the same kind of criticism to Dickens that has been demonstrated in his Browning criticism.

In the text of *Charles Dickens*, Chesterton explains clearly to his readers those religious concerns that are of utmost importance to him and by which he judges Dickens, chiefly his belief in an equality and democracy that Chesterton regarded as intrinsically Christian.

The note of the last few decades in art and ethics has been that a man is stamped with an irrevocable psychology, and is cramped for perpetuity in the prison of his skull. It [the Victorian Age] was a world that expected everything of everybody. It was a world that encouraged anybody to be anything. And in England and literature its living expression was Dickens. (46)

Whereas in *Browning* he finds an optimism far profounder than Victorian optimism; in *Charles Dickens* he finds an optimism far preferable to the

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<sup>3</sup>It is worth noting that Browning deliberately impersonates alien figures in his poems, and his use of dramatic monologue has the affect of being what Bakhtin would call a dialogue—since the speaking character refuses to define himself completely.

pessimism of the *fin de siècle*. Chesterton rejected both the Victorian optimism that placed its hope in the progress of humanity and culture through science and technology as well as the pessimism of the Decadents that denied life itself. Chesterton did, however, affirm a different sort of optimism, that of Browning and Dickens. Instead of being optimistic at the prospect of soon feeling at home in the world, Chesterton, as he stated in *Orthodoxy*, believed that “Christian optimism is based on the fact that we do NOT fit in to the world” (*Heretics/Orthodoxy* 236).

In *Dickens*, Chesterton again finds an affinity between himself and the master novelist, particularly with reference to Dickens’s affirmation of democratic optimism. Of Dickens’s preference for the common man, Chesterton states, “Here he touches that other side of common life which he was chiefly to champion; he was to show that there is no ale like the ale of a poor man's festival, and no pleasures like the pleasures of the poor (68). Furthermore, Chesterton writes of Dickens’s optimism that “He knew very well the essential truth, that the true optimist can only continue an optimist so long as he is discontented. For the full value of this life can only be got by fighting; the violent take it by storm. And if we have accepted everything, we have missed something -- war. This life of ours is a very enjoyable fight, but a very miserable truce” (202). Later, Chesterton will repeat portions of these claims almost verbatim in his criticism of Robert Louis Stevenson. In the following quotation, for example we see the delineation of optimism again *vis à vis* the pessimism of the *fin de siècle*:

Stevenson seemed to say to the semi-suicides drooping round him at the café tables; drinking absinthe and discussing atheism: ‘Hang it all, the hero of a penny-dreadful play was a better man than you

are! A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured was an art more worthy of living men than the art that you are all professing; painting pasteboard figures of pirates and admirals was better worth doing than all this; it was fun; it was fighting; it was a life and a lark; and if I can't do anything else, dang me but I will try to do that again!' (*Stevenson* 76)

Once again, Chesterton praises the literary figure for the philosophy that inheres in his literature, a philosophy that found another voice in Chesterton's booming tenor voice. But Chesterton also connects his literary philosophy to his literary style.

He praises Dickens as an artist, with particular affection for his characters. Chesterton writes that one "cannot artistically divide the output into books. The best of his work can be found in the worst of his works. . . . [T]he primary elements, are not the stories, but the characters who affect the stories -- or, more often still, the characters who do not affect the stories (*Charles Dickens* 84-5). In other words, Chesterton praises Dickens for his artistic ability to create common yet memorable, life-like characters. It is Dickens's belief in the common man, equality, and democracy—all part of his optimistic vision—that allowed him to create such unforgettable characters. Every man can identify with the Dickensian characters because he writes of everyman.

Likewise, Chesterton finds Stevenson's style, his mastery of language and his ability to weave a good yarn, all to be laudable. He writes, "I am one of those humble characters for whom the main matter of style is concerned with making a statement; and generally, in the case of Stevenson, with telling a story" (*Stevenson* 95). Elsewhere, he states that the "test [of style] is whether the words are well or ill chosen, not for the pupose [sic] of fitting our own taste in words,

but for the pupose [sic] of satisfying everybody's sense of the realities of things" (*Stevenson* 97). So style again receives much attention in Chesterton's criticism. The question of style concerns how well the author's piecing together of words corresponds to reality. Chesterton emphatically states that Stevenson's style itself was optimistic. "The very movement of the sentence is the movement of a man going somewhere and generally fighting something; and that is where optimism and pessimism are alike opposed to that ultimate or potential peace, which the violent take by storm" (*Stevenson* 102). Chesterton finds at work in Stevenson's style, as he did in Browning's and Dickens's styles, that orthodox philosophy by which he defined his own life. Stevenson's diction and style enable him to transcend and overcome his Paganism and latent Puritanism (102). In Watts he called this orthodoxy of sentiment not optimism but a "sense of the joyful austerity of things" (*Watts* 19).

Chesterton's short biography of the Victorian painter, George Frederick Watts, like his work on Browning and Dickens, sought to recover Watts as an important painter of the Victorian era. His reputation had waned considerably by the time of his death in 1904, the same year of Chesterton's publication. His art was dismissed for being overly didactic—the very same trait that Chesterton sought to salvage in Watts. In attempting to explicate the philosophy of an artistic creation, Chesterton made little distinction between pictorial and literary art, and one must recall that Chesterton's formal training at Slade was in pictorial art. He praises Watts for the philosophy that is evident in his art, even if didactic.

The salient and essential characteristic of Watts and men of his school was that they regarded life as a whole. They had in their heads, as it were, a synthetic philosophy which put everything into a

certain relation with God and the wheel of things. Thus, psychologically speaking, they were incapable not merely of holding such an opinion, but actually of thinking such a thought as that of art for art's sake; it was to them like talking about voting for voting's sake, or amputating for amputating's sake. (Watts 16)

He does not ignore the criticism of Watts's art that decries it as didactic; rather he seeks to delineate the purpose of Watts's didacticism, judging it accordingly. In other words, he does not dismiss Watts because his paintings are didactic, but judges him on his own terms. He does not dismiss him simply because his paintings "preach" rather than demonstrate individual impressions or abstractions; he attempts to discern how well Watts's paintings compare to the subtle (not merely the literal and obvious) reality of things as they are. This is rather like attempting to compare the works of Chesterton to the realities of life rather than dismissing him simply because he wrote as a Catholic or more broadly as a Christian. Against the charges that Watts's allegorical paintings did not constitute art, Chesterton suggested that the paintings were not "in short, the very thing that the opponents of Watts and his school say that they are. They are not merely literary" (43). He rejects the notion that a work of art can be reduced to a message or moral. Over and against this view, Chesterton suggested that Watts simply "copying the great spiritual and central realities which literature and philosophy also set out to copy" (54).

As early as 1901, Chesterton was publishing essays on the great bard of the English language, plummeting the same depths in the works of Shakespeare that he would in later criticism. Of particular value in these essays are Chesterton's discussion, albeit brief, of Shakespeare's inherited philosophy and his comparison of Shakespeare to Dante. In 1932, he wrote, "The greatest poets of

the world have a certain serenity, because they have not bothered to invent a small philosophy, but have rather inherited a large philosophy. . . . [T]he great poet only professes to express the thought that everybody has always had” (*Chesterton on Shakespeare* 28). In other words, Chesterton lauds Shakespeare for not ignoring the democracy of the dead but rather re-expressing the tradition as it had never been previously embodied in literary art. However, Chesterton finds Shakespeare’s inherited philosophy lacking when compared to chief poet of the Middle Ages. “It is vaguely implied that Shakespeare was always jolly and Dante always gloomy. But, in a philosophical sense, it is almost the other way. [. . .] Do we not know in our hearts that Shakespeare could have dealt with Dante’s Hell but hardly with Dante’s Heaven?” (*Chesterton on Shakespeare* 36). In his work on Chaucer he wrote that “Shakespeare is more concentrated on Hamlet than Dante is upon Hell; for the very reason that Dante’s mind is full of the larger plan of which this is merely a part” (*Chaucer* 334). To question the greatness of Shakespeare’s style is, of course, foolish, and Chesterton also recognizes the greatness of Shakespeare’s philosophy in large part; but compared to Dante, Shakespeare’s philosophy of life leaves much to be desired. As Ralph C. Wood has noted, Shakespeare expresses the breadth of human experience, while Dante plumbs its depths and ascends to its heights. To blame for Shakespeare’s lesser philosophy, Chesterton finds the Puritanism of the sixteenth century stifling compared to the expanse and glory of the Middle Ages. While Shakespeare possesses a broad vision indeed, it is confined by the milieu that produced him, that Puritan one which Chesterton disdains.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>There is an exceedingly keen irony implicit here, since the reigning critical consciousness



Chesterton's criticism of Chaucer is no different. The skill of the writer is unquestionable, so Chesterton devotes the majority of his attention to Chaucer's philosophy of life in relation to his artistic work. What he finds is that "Chaucer was capable of greatness even in the sense of gravity" (*Chaucer* 159). This expanse of vision is not unrelated to the greatness of Chaucer's abilities as an artist but the cause of it, Chesterton argues. "There is a largeness and liberty in the humorist who gets such huge enjoyment out of the metaphysical chicken, and expands so large a world of fancy out of the little opportunity of the fable" (*Chaucer* 164). Chaucer's work, Chesterton claims, "is concerned with ideas; but with ideas that are never new in the sense of neat, as they are never old in the sense of exhausted. They lie a little too deep to find perfect expression in any age; and great poets can give great hints of them in any" (*Chaucer* 172). These ideas are guided by a "clear" and "well-balanced" philosophy which "was Christian philosophy, and all the more so because it had been mixed in the original Christian fashion with many Pagan influences" (*Chaucer* 190). Again Chesterton relates this philosophy of life to style. "He was not an artist who picked perfect words to produce his exact effect; [. . .] he was a philosopher who drew theoretical distinctions, along the lines of contemporary thought, with almost the delicacy of a theologian" (*Chaucer* 274). But he did not write theology, nor can his stories be reduced to such. Chaucer, Chesterton argues, created a new style to convey his meaning, claiming that Chaucer was the author of the novel as a form of literature because, in a word, "The story-tellers do not merely exist to tell the stories; the stories exist to tell us something about the story-tellers" (*Chaucer*

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holds that Shakespeare's work is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic in character.

279). As Flannery O'Connor would later say, "A story is a way to say something that can't be said in any other way." Chesterton seems to be saying the same of Chaucer, but Chaucer had to invent a form wherein the story itself, the characters, and the philosophy so coinhere that they cannot be separated without great loss to them all.

At this point, one might begin to think that Chesterton wrote critical studies only of those whom he was uncritical; however, he also published criticism of those whose worldviews he did not share, nor did he agree with all those whom he praised. Though he praised the optimism of Watts, Shakespeare, Stevenson, and Dickens, he found faults in their respective philosophies. Watts was a Stoic more than a Puritan; the Puritanism of Stevenson was more Pagan than Puritan. Shakespeare too suffered from the weaknesses of his Puritan age though not himself a Puritan, and Dickens like the rest possessed an authentically Christian optimism, but was too infected by Victorian optimism, thus dismissing such crucial doctrines as original sin.

In 1902, Chesterton published a pithy study of Thomas Carlyle in which he praised the merits of the novelist but found his vision lacking. Carlyle's strength, of course, was the historical novel; but, as Chesterton points out, "Carlyle did realise the fact that every man carries about with him his own life and atmosphere, he did not realise that other truth, that every man carries about with him his own theory of the world" (*Thomas Carlyle* 29-30). Furthermore, Chesterton remarks that Carlyle "neglect[s] to realise the importance of theory and of alternative theories in human affairs" (*Carlyle* 30). More important than historical details, Chesterton writes, "is the history of the human head and the

human heart, and of what great loves it has been enamoured” (*Carlyle* 31). In other words, while praising Carlyle’s art, Chesterton rejects the philosophy or, better yet, the theology of his art. Already, long before he would publish his best criticism, in this short little essay that was part of “The Bookman Booklets” the heart of Chestertonian criticism is present.

Chesterton presents similar themes in an essay on Leo Tolstoy published in 1906. In the Tolstoy essay, themes that will later loom large in *Orthodoxy* (1908) are again present in the form of literary criticism. After praising Tolstoy’s merits, he summarizes his evaluation of Tolstoy, “He is not a mystic: and therefore he has a tendency to go mad. [. . .] In the main, and from the beginning of time, mysticism has kept men sane. The thing that has driven them mad was logic” (*Tolstoy* 38). This is why mathematicians, according to Chesterton, tend to go insane but artists do not (*Watts* 35). Chesterton finds Tolstoy a fine writer but antithetical to his own theological vision that he will later make explicit. In fact, he finds in Tolstoy an alternative to his own theological vision. “Tolstoy,” Chesterton states, “besides being a magnificent novelist, is one of the very few men alive who have a real, solid, and serious view of life. He is a Catholic church, of which he is the only member, the somewhat arrogant Pope and the somewhat submissive layman” (*Tolstoy* 36). In other words, there is much to praise about Tolstoy, but finally he fails because his vision of the world fails.

Some three years after the publication of *Robert Browning* and *Charles Dickens*, Chesterton tackled his friend and foe George Bernard Shaw. In a review of the book, Shaw blasted Chesterton for being mistaken on several points, but conceded that it was a masterful piece of criticism, however misleading. In

particular, Chesterton blamed Shaw's misreading of Shakespeare on the fact that Shaw was a Puritan "while Shakespeare was spiritually a Catholic" (*Chesterton on Shaw* 411). As in his criticism of Tolstoy, so did Chesterton indict Shaw for being a church unto himself, stating that Shaw "began to create not only a pulpit of his own, but a church and creed of his own. It is a very vast and universal religion; and it is not his fault that he is the only member of it" (*Chesterton on Shaw* 444-45).

But despite such severe strictures, Chesterton praises Shaw by saying that he "combined being intelligent with being intelligible. He has popularised philosophy, or rather he has re-popularised it, for philosophy is always popular, except in peculiar corrupt and oligarchic ages like our own" (*Chesterton on Shaw* 480). Furthermore, Chesterton praises Shaw's plain, simple style (*Chesterton on Shaw* 482). Finally, he praises him for his contribution to modern drama:

He has improved philosophic discussions by making them more popular. But he has also improved popular amusements by making them more philosophic. . . . In this great sense Shaw has brought philosophy back into drama. (*Chesterton on Shaw* 483-4)

Here we find the relationship Chesterton draws between the art and the philosophy of literature. For all the disagreement between the two men, Chesterton can praise Shaw's style because it is so deeply philosophical. In fact, one might say that Shaw is a better essayist than dramatist. But for all the compliments, one need not know much about the Chesterton-Shaw relationship to await the rebuttal:

This is the first and finest item of the original Bernard Shaw creed: that if reason says that life is irrational, life must be content to reply that reason is lifeless; life is the primary thing, and if reason

impedes it, then reason must be trodden down into the mire amid the most abject superstitions. (455)

Shaw, Chesterton contends, would be more contented with man were he an animal. While holding him as a dear friend and regarding him as a fine dramatist, Chesterton is repulsed by Shaw's Nietzschean anthropology—which might better be called zoology. Chesterton also finds the same philosophy in Thomas Hardy but argues that it is the product of his atheism (*Victorian* 483). This anthropology Chesterton viewed as antithetical to his own. Shaw wants man to confirm his urges and impulses to the natural realm, denying the supernatural as magic and mystification. “Now against all this [Shaw's zoology], as its chief enemy, though he may not know it, stands the old Catholic philosophy of Man. The first and last idea of it is Resurrection, that is the resurrection of the *whole* of man” (“Second Thoughts on Shaw” 604). Shaw's anti-anthropology constituted a huge failure according to Chesterton.

### *Criticism and the Common Man*

Chesterton rejects both the optimism and the pessimism prevalent in his own day. He championed the commonness of the common man; thus, he also championed democracy as the best form of government. This was not because of some nostalgic romanticism but because of his basic theological conviction, as Fagerberg demonstrates:

Chesterton defends the common life of ordinary men and women because he believes that they were created by God to enjoy good things. He revolts against the various progressive movements appearing in his day which offered to improve the common institutions of family and school and home, wondering why the idea of a man and woman enjoying each other, their family, their children, and their home was so inconceivable to these specialists.

Of course he has an answer in mind to the rhetorical question: it is because these heresies operate from a narrow anthropology dislodged from the broad, theological horizon. (46)

Thus did Chesterton praise men like Browning, Dickens, and Stevenson for their love of the common man, equality, and democracy. It is for the same reason that Chesterton praises Stevenson's rejection of his Scottish Calvinism, for Chesterton saw at work in that system of doctrine an unjust categorizing of humanity based upon a capricious doctrine of election. Though Chesterton's optimism was not founded on man's unfallen abilities, his theological vision was framed by a high view of humanity. He championed the common man because of the *imago Dei* and the doctrine of the Incarnation which prompted in Chesterton a vigorous Christian engagement with the world:

To the orthodox there must always be a case for revolution; for in the hearts of men God has been put under the feet of Satan. In the upper world hell once rebelled against heaven. But in this world heaven is rebelling against hell. For the orthodox there can always be a revolution; for a revolution is a restoration. At any instant you may strike a blow for the perfection which no man has seen since Adam. (*Heretics/Orthodoxy* 264)

Not only does the Incarnation suggest God's own presence in the world, but it also suggests a radical communitarianism. The divine breaking into human history has important consequences for all of humanity. The consequences of the Incarnation and atonement are so large that Christianity necessarily provides "a view of the universe satisfying all sides of life; a complete and complex truth with something to say about everything (*Everlasting* 256). The "size" of Christianity is shown to be explicitly Catholic in *The Everlasting Man*. "And this is the light; that the Catholic creed is catholic and that nothing else is catholic. The philosophy of the Church is universal. The philosophy of the philosophers was

not universal” (*Everlasting* 311). In summary, Chesterton states, “The moral of all this is an old one; that religion is revelation. In other words it is a vision, and a vision received by faith; but it is a vision of reality” (*Everlasting* 375-6).

Furthermore, “The Catholic faith is the reconciliation [of paganism and Christianity] because it is the realisation both of mythology and philosophy. It is a story and in that sense one of a hundred stories; only it is a true story. It is a philosophy and in that sense one of a hundred philosophies; only it is a philosophy that is like life” (*Everlasting* 378). As Fagerberg notes, “Chesterton’s Catholicism does not obscure paganism, it intersects it. This intersection transforms paganism, true; but it does not nullify or vilify the pagan world. When the human triangle and the divine trinity intersect, then grace perfects nature” (64).

Chesterton is thus drawn to those authors of the Great Tradition who promote such a view of humankind. And this exalted doctrine of man is not disconnected from his disdain for Eugenics though the topic seldom appears in his literary criticism. In fact, we might offer the bulk of his literary criticism as part of the dialogue with eugenics. As we have seen Chesterton’s rejection of Eugenics was based in large part on his belief that every person regardless of race, class, or other arbitrary divisions, has been created in the image of God and that God’s condescension to become man Himself has radically restored all things, especially fallen humanity. In this light, he offers Browning, Dickens, Stevenson, Watts, Shakespeare, and Chaucer as defenders of humanity and implicit opponents of Eugenics. To an evaluation of his dialogical style we now turn.

## CHAPTER SIX

### “So Terrible a Savor”: The Prophetic Nature of Chesterton’s *Eugenics and Other Evils* and the Lasting Merit of Chesterton’s Style

#### *Chesterton and Contemporary Eugenics*

When in 1922 G. K. Chesterton collected and re-published the essays that comprised *Eugenics and Other Evils*, he wrote in conclusion:

The thing died at last, and the stench of it stank to the sky. It might be thought that so terrible a savour would never altogether leave the memories of men; but men’s memories are unstable things. It may be that gradually these dazed dupes will gather again together, and attempt again to believe their dreams and disbelieve their eyes. There may be some whose love of slavery is so ideal and disinterested that they are loyal to it even in its defeat. (122)

In fact, he published *Eugenics and Other Evils* in 1922 because “the thing” had already begun to resurface. Since Chesterton himself died in 1937, he did not see how Eugenics would flourish under Hitler’s Nazi regime. But he would not have been surprised for, as he states, “men’s memories are unstable things.” Likewise it seems quite probable that Chesterton would be horrified but not surprised that the term itself—a term which scientists have fought long and hard to distance themselves from has already re-surfaced in public discourse in the opening days of the year 2007. A survey of the continuing pertinence of the Eugenics debate is necessary in order to evaluate G. K. C.’s contribution to it.

The girl known only as Ashley made headlines in the opening days of 2007 because of the radical medical treatment that she had received, causing protestors to cry, “Eugenics!” Born with static encephalopathy, which has prevented her from mental development beyond that of a three-month old,



Ashley underwent surgery and then hormone therapy in a process that has come to be known as “The Ashley Treatment,” an elective hysterectomy to prevent the disabled child from reaching puberty and developing both physically and sexually (Tanner and *Ashley’s Blog*). Among the alleged benefits, the parents claim that Ashley now has a reduced chance of developing the breast cancer that has been endemic to her family. But the matter that has received the most public attention is that Ashley will now remain manageable in her size. Ashley’s parents can keep caring for their “pillow angel,” as they refer to her, without the added difficulty of lifting and caring for an adult suffering from static encephalopathy (Tanner).

Her parents write on their blog:

Unlike what most people thought, the decision to pursue the “Ashley Treatment” was not a difficult one. Ashley will be a lot more physically comfortable free of menstrual cramps, free of the discomfort associated with large and fully-developed breasts, and with a smaller, lighter body that is better suited to constant lying down and is easier to be moved around. Furthermore, given Ashley’s mental age a nine and a half year old body is more appropriate and more dignified than a fully grown female body. (*Ashley’s Blog*)

Thus can dignity be imposed on Ashley surgically, rather than naturally realized within her inborn condition, grotesque though it is. One wonders at what point it will be declared even more dignified for Ashley to “die well” than to continue living. Such, her husband determined, was the necessity in the case of Terri Schiavo, the comatose woman who suffered from hypoxic encephalopathy (“Terri’s Story”). The celebrated Dr. Jack Kevorkian claimed to have assisted over 130 people in committing suicide during the 1990s before being imprisoned, though he approaches a parole board soon (“Timeline”). Many European countries have already begun reversing long-standing bans against euthanasia,

and many more governments are discussing the matter in their various legislative bodies. A current case in Rome involves an Italian person suffering from muscular dystrophy who has been on an artificial respirator since 1997 who wishes to end her life. Similarly, a case in Spain currently being debated involves a Spanish woman who wishes to legally end her long battle with the same disease. These cases are especially important because of the Catholic influence that has traditionally been exerted in such countries. The debate denotes the weakening influence of the Church in ethical matters. But some countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium have already legalized euthanasia and have begun to attract so-called “suicide tourists” (“Italian Euthanasia Case”). Visitors from other countries secure passports, buy one-way tickets, and end their lives with the assistance of the staff at clinics set up for this purpose. Other countries such as Australia continue to move for the legalization of euthanasia. As Francis Coombe declared regarding a recent New Zealand parliamentary debate, “Surely it is everyone’s right to have this legal option of last resort as insurance against a living hell” (qtd. in “Independent Move”). Our own euphemism for such actions would surely have been the target of Chesterton’s ire. The term *euthanasia* sterilizes death and denies that life—however fraught with suffering—is better than the last enemy, death itself. Such terms as *euthanasia* and *physician-assisted suicide* allow us to ignore the reality that Western society has come full circle, permitting medical doctors to legally end life than rather save it as they have promised to do. This, as Robert Jay Lifton notes in *The Nazi Doctors*, was an important shift that enabled the rise of the Third Reich.

In addition to legislators and caregivers who advocate that to die is better than to suffer, medical doctors have also begun to add their voice to the chorus of death; but as Richard John Neuhaus has written, such end-of-life decisions are not unrelated to mid-life decisions. “There is, at all stages of life, an obvious connection between the harvesting of healthy organs and the decision about when someone is dead, or should die. The question of euthanasia is thus an integral part of the progress of the eugenics project” (13). Though he is writing about harvesting organs from infants, the connection between mid-life and end-of-life decisions and eugenics remains the same. End-of-life decisions are arbitrarily applied to what may occur in the middle of a given life. In other words, the legalization of euthanasia is a sort of Pandora’s Box: once opened the application of euthanasia becomes completely arbitrary. If Ashley’s life will not be dignified by entering adulthood, why should Ashley be permitted to live into her adult years? It seems only a matter of time before Ashley’s parents will request legal permission to put an end to her (their) suffering altogether. This observation is not to disparage Ashley’s parents in particular but to underscore the further point made by Neuhaus; in our technological age, we find ourselves bound to do those things that we *can* do simply because they are possible (7). Surely Neuhaus is correct to connect this shift to what Allan Bloom has called “debonair nihilism” (qtd. in Neuhaus 7). If as Chesterton feared in the midst of the Slade crisis nothing is real except mind, as opposed to matter; if all we have are our preferences, then suffering becomes increasingly difficult to understand and legitimize. As Stanley Hauerwas, writes, our culture shuns suffering, especially in children, “because we assume that children lack a life story which

potentially give their illness some meaning” (228). He goes on to assert, “But I suspect what bothers us even more about childhood suffering is that it makes us face our deepest suspicions that all of us lack a life story which makes us capable of responding to illness in a manner that enables us to go on as individuals, as friends, as parents, and as a community” (228). Our rather meaningless existence easily gives way to allowing technological advances to progress solely because they are possible rather than because they are beneficial. We must, as Hauerwas notes, find ourselves in “God’s narrative” if we are to escape such nihilism.

Such ethical dilemmas are not relegated to end and mid-life decisions; genetic scanning now allows parents to detect genetic defects before a baby’s birth. As Stu Oldham writes, “Modern scanning techniques mean most severe illnesses or deformities could be discovered in the womb and the baby could be aborted” (“Health Debate”). As Firuza R. Parikh writes, “The technique of Premimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) has enabled us to screen embryos for high-risk diseases and unknown conditions so that an embryo with an inherited condition need not be implanted in the womb.” The writer goes on to foresee a world wherein genetic malformations are eliminated and humans are bred for existence on other planets. And while this may seem the stuff of science fiction, the writer of “Gene Research” shows the real “benefit” of such advances. Such strides will increase “our ability to further define the causes of infertility and identify the healthiest embryos that are most likely to implant [. . .] and, at the same time, support the ongoing initiative within our field to decrease multiple births through elective single embryo transfer” (“Gene Research”). Emma

Charlton, however, points out the ethical dilemma inherent such procedures, “The state-of-the-art procedure—which enables parents with hereditary illnesses to select an embryo that does not carry the disease—is opposed by the Catholic Church because it implies destroying the remaining embryos.” The question is not altogether different from Chesterton’s, “Who sets the criteria? Who decides that a person doesn’t have the right to live?” (Andre Vingt-Trois qtd. in Charlton). This decision, as Chesterton so clearly foresaw, will never be decided by the person under the microscope, in this case the person who cannot make that decision for him or herself.

Furthermore, a sharp dichotomy must be drawn between the embryo and the person for the advance of science to continue. Scientifically denying the humanity of the embryo allows us to destroy the embryo without pause. *In vitro* fertilization has paved the way for this development. Frozen long enough, an embryo no longer seems the same as the embryo implanted in the womb but just another specimen of laboratory culture. Viewed as embryos, ignoring the fact that the entire DNA code is present within them, we can then more easily separate them into categories of fit and unfit. While we cannot yet treat genetic malformations, we can prevent them from occurring by scanning for them and destroying those deemed “unfit” for life, though the lives of many persons with genetic disorders attest to the fact that such persons can enjoy relatively “normal” lives. But all of these assumptions hinge on first denying the essential personhood of the embryo, which relegates it to a life form lesser than the animals, a cell development with as much dignity as plant cells; however, as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith writes, “From the moment of

conception, the life of every human being is to be respected in an absolute way because man is the only creature on earth that God has ‘wished for himself’ and the spiritual soul of each man is ‘immediately created’ by God; his whole being bears the image of the Creator” (*Instruction 5*). To deny the humanity of the embryo is to deny the stamp of his or her Creator; it is to deny the *imago Dei*; it is ultimately to deny the Creator himself. Elsewhere the document states:

*It is a duty to condemn the particular gravity of the voluntary destruction of human embryos obtained “in vitro” for the sole purpose of research either by means of artificial insemination or by means of “twin fission”. By acting in this way the researcher usurps the place of God; and, even though he may be unaware of this, he sets himself up as the master of the destiny of others inasmuch as he arbitrarily chooses whom he will allow to live and whom he will send to death and kills defenseless human beings. (Instruction I.5.1)*

The persons who determine who will live and who will die are parents who are intended to foster and nurture the lives of their children and medical doctors who are supposed to save lives. Despite what we should have learned from Hitler’s so-called scientific state, we have increasingly generated our own scientific state.

In addition to prenatal genetic scanning, Claudia Kalb writes of the possibility of genetic screening to determine a fully developed person’s predisposition to certain genetic maladies. “If the scientists are right, genetic tests for some of these diseases could be available by 2010. Testing positive doesn’t guarantee that you’ll get the illness, but it does help determine your risk.” Such screening would detect “predispositions” to certain illnesses such as various cancers, which discovery could then result in elective surgeries to remove otherwise healthy parts of the body predisposed to the specific malformation. Documented cases of elective mastectomies and hysterectomies already exist; but

as Kalb writes, “Having healthy breasts or ovaries removed isn’t easy, but the payoff—an end to constant anxiety and pre-emptive strike at disease—can be well worth it.” The possibility of such pre-emptive surgeries only increases worries that such testing will eventually jeopardize health insurance and job security. Health insurance companies, in fact, have already attempted to deny benefits to persons with known predispositions; but the physician’s spin is entirely positive. “We’re using genetics to move from treating the disease after it happens [. . .] to preventing the worst symptoms of the disease before it happens” (Kalb). This is eugenics without the unpleasantness of the term itself. In the name of preventative medicine, a term Chesterton abhorred, we can scientifically eliminate human suffering—a eugenic enterprise indeed.

The stem cell research debate fuels similar fears—embryos engineered for research are never intended for a life of their own; however, the Congregation of the Faith reminds us that such embryos nonetheless constitute a form of humanity and must therefore be respected and treated as such. *“If the embryos are living, whether viable or not, they must be respected just like any other human person; experimentation on embryos which is not directly therapeutic is illicit” (Instruction I.4.1).* If a viable embryo which has not even developed into a fetus, much less taken a breath of air on its own, is allowed to be discarded, then certainly an infant having no more than a few days of life might be harvested for organs that will find use in infants than can survive with the transplanted organs. Such is the case of those infants born with anencephaly. Some 3,500 such babies are born annually in American and live no more than a mere month. Since the babies’ organs cannot be transplanted if harvested after their death, the hospital

in “Loma Linda recommends to parents that the children be allowed to live for no more than a week before taking the parts. The parents, we are told, find this procedure ‘deeply meaningful,’ since their disappointment in having a handicapped baby is ‘redeemed’ by putting the baby to good use in ‘helping others.’ (Neuhaus 11). As previously noted by Hauerwas, we cannot possibly imagine that the presence of suffering in the infant might have some meaning in the narrative of so young a life-form. The infant suffering from anencephaly is deemed unworthy of any remaining life in comparison to the life free of genetic disorder that his or her organs might help sustain. In addition to asking, “Who decides that a person doesn’t have the right to live?” we must also ask, “What is the number of days that makes a life worth living?” “At what point can suffering be legitimized?”

This is not an entirely Western phenomenon. The Happy Family Guiding Centre in Guangrao County, Shandong Province, China conducted “58 training classes on bridal, eugenics and climacteric” last year in addition to monitoring some 1800 persons for eugenic purposes (“Happy Family”). In Vietnam, efforts by the United Nations Populations Fund have been made to reduce the number of “gender-based abortions” (“Vietnam”). Similarly, this is a growing problem in India where long-standing preferences for male descendants remain intact, and technology allows the parent to ascertain the sex of the child before he or she is born. Certainly, this determination is distanced only by fractions from discarding unwanted embryos, even as it also not unrelated to standard medical practices in the Netherlands which prevent treatment from being administered to ailing infants delivered before twenty-five weeks (Oldham, “Euthanasia”). Oldham also



reports that “Some senior doctors acknowledge that decisions are already being made every day in New Zealand not to resuscitate babies with irreversible conditions” (“Health Debate”). But the West leads the way. In an open letter regarding such issues, Lord Robert Winston writes:

A mother choosing a female embryo after losing a daughter in catastrophic circumstances is hardly going to unravel the moral fabric of British society. [. . .] If we could prevent fatal diseases which cripple children and adults, why not go a stage further and improve human ability? We already enhance our children in all kinds of ways, offering them vaccination against common infections and orthodontic treatment to improve their appearance. Why not do all of this more efficiently, and with less effort, by enhancing human embryos? (“Why I Believe”)

This constitutes sound logic if the personhood and *imago Dei* of the embryo is denied. Similarly, Glenn McGee asks if “there any real difference between curing illness and enhancing traits,” though he admits that “genetic engineering is unlikely to improve our character and intelligence” (112, 111). The changes for which Winston argues might allow some control over and the enhancement of physical traits, but, as we have seen, the science of genetics cannot improve our character. It can only worsen our character by inflicting suffering, by inflicting death itself, by snuffing out life. The denial of life becomes an alleged improvement: such is the Orwellian quality of our genetically engineered present.

As Neuhaus perceptively observes, the distinction between such genetic engineering and eugenics is not ambiguous even at best.

Thus, in the longer view of history, the horror of the Third Reich may have effected but a momentary pause in the theory and practice of eugenics. For today, four decades later, eugenics is back, and it gives every appearance of returning with vengeance in the form of developments ranging from the adventuresome to the bizarre to the ghoulish: the manufacture of synthetic children, the

fabrication of families, artificial sex, and new ways of using and terminating undesired human life. (1)

The aim of genetic screening and genetic enhancement amounts to Eugenics without the employment of eugenic language. This is not to say that the study of genetics is a so-called sham science as was Eugenics; it is not. It is to say that as long as genetics remains a science devoted to decoding not curing, it runs a course akin to the old Eugenics. As David Alton writes:

Genetic tests claiming to reveal instability, illness, homosexuality, or a low IQ all pave the way for eugenic abortions. Quality controls and perfection tests will also see the emergence of a genetic underclass of the uninsurable, the unbreedable, the unwanted and the unmanned. In the caste system to come, suitors, partners and predators will be encouraged to envy your genes with envy of contempt. We will become prisoners of heredity and slaves of a manipulated reproductive system. British birthright will be replaced by the right birth. Eugenics leads to the repression of variation and difference. Yet, as these awesome developments have occurred there has been hardly a murmur of protest. (“Dignity” 1)

Slowly, scientists, physicians, parents, and legislators can rewrite the human narrative by disallowing the births of unwanted genetic types. The prevention of such births occurred in Chesterton’s time through sterilization and contraception, but those practices have become commonplace in our own time. As James Tunstead Burtchaell notes, the push for sterilization and birth control threatens to eclipse marriage itself. As he comments, “There are, in fact, more sterilizations performed annually upon Americans today than there were American marriages being performed when [Marie] Stopes and [Margaret] Sanger began their work of enlightenment” (98).

Theologians are not the only ones to draw the connection between current trends and our eugenic past. Troy Duster writes that “Recent progress in

molecular biology and the discovery of the genetic basis of certain illnesses are beginning to revive the old eugenics (which had been discredited by association with the Nazis) and above all the old mythologies, which, clothed in the biological sciences, were sometimes used to legitimize social differences” (vii). But like McGee, he too acknowledges that such genetic studies have taught us more about genetic development than actually improving the human race. “We have learned a lot more about who is likely to have a genetically-based illness than how to treat that illness” (ix). Furthermore, he discerns an implicit racism in the emphasis in certain genetic testing. “*Despite the fact that Tay-Sachs is a much more fatal disorder, it was sickle-cell carrier screening that became mandatory*” (47). Genetic screening, he asserts, has already prevented an unknown number of embryos of African-American descent to survive, and the future is limited only by the preference of those in political and scientific power. But Duster also notes that “to screen for a disorder that cannot be cured can tap a reservoir of latent, recurring fears about the motives of those who would *prevent* genetic disorder rather than *treat* it” (53). The implications of such pre-natal, genetic screening are frightening: “if one finds what one is looking for, then termination of the pregnancy is high on the list of potential intervention strategies” (53). The very existence of such a screen suggests the unfitness of afflicted fetuses (Duster 80-1). The types of genetic disorders found with such screening cannot be cured, only eliminated: “to avoid the ‘genetic’ disorder, one must either change the genes or set up a genetic screen to prevent those affected fetuses from being born” (57). Certainly such procedures are to be classified as Eugenics, though the old

distinction between positive and negative eugenics is rendered useless, as Neuhaus reveals:

[I]ntervention to eliminate a defective gene rather than to eliminate a defective fetus may be viewed as either positive or negative. Still, some of the more striking changes today are in the area of the positive improvement of the human stock. Indeed, what is now being done and proposed makes earlier efforts at improving the race (for example, the socially and morally clumsy *Lebensborn* program for breeding the SS elite with superior Reich female stock) seem pitifully primitive. (6)

Regardless of whether such practices are considered positive or negative eugenics, they are without question eugenic in motivation. The same impulse that sought to eliminate the Jews entirely seeks to eliminate the deformed in their entirety.

#### *Chesterton and Contemporary Catholic Teaching on Genetics*

Chesterton could not foresee the radical technological and scientific advances that would come in the latter half of the twentieth and again in the early twenty-first century; but he does remarkably foreshadow the theological and ethical thought that would guide the Roman Catholic Church's contemporary opposition to all forms of eugenics. The genius of Chesterton's *Eugenics and Other Evils* is that it does not rely on explicit ethical and theological categories so much as on logic itself. As Sheridan Gilley notes, "Chesterton was a Catholic convert who did not inherit a traditional Catholic teaching on the family but embraced it, like Christianity itself, as a kind of wild poetry. Moreover he defended the family, not from the high ground of revelation, but as a form of mystical commonsense, learned from hard experience and not from family inheritance" (131). Furthermore, Chesterton actually widens the conversation

about eugenics by not relegating it to the narrow realm of theological discussion. In so doing, however, he does not avoid theological concepts so much as he relies on the same concepts that the Church would eventually explicate in developing its stance against eugenics. This is not to suggest that the Church took its theology from Chesterton, but that he possessed preternatural foresight.

*Gaudium et Spes*, one of the four constitutions issued by the Second Vatican Council, makes explicit that eugenics undermines human freedom by disjoining it from the *imago Dei*, as Chesterton had already discerned.

Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness. Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly; and rightly to be sure. Often however they foster it perversely as a license for doing whatever pleases them, even if it is evil. For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. [. . .] Man achieves such dignity when, emancipating himself from all captivity to passion, he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and procures for himself through effective and skilful action, apt helps to that end. Since man's freedom has been damaged by sin, only by the aid of God's grace can he bring such a relationship with God into full flower.  
(17)

Pope John Paul II declared in *Centesimus Annus* (1991), a misunderstanding of human freedom ends in the solipsism which Chesterton experienced during his Slade School crisis. "The essence of freedom," writes John Paul II, "then becomes self-love carried to the point of contempt for God and neighbour, a self-love which leads to an unbridled affirmation of self-interest and which refuses to be limited by any demand of justice" (17). This is the same impulse that Chesterton detected at work in both the Impressionists and the Eugenicists. To accept the argument of Eugenics was, for Chesterton, to deny human freedom, and thus the

essence of humanity. The connection to eugenics is made explicit by John Paul II in another passage from the same encyclical.

Furthermore, whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, *abortion*, *euthanasia* or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilations, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator. (27.3, italics added)

It is because humanity is made in the image of God and because humanity possesses individual freedom that eugenics is morally condemned by the Church, a condemnation that Chesterton extracted from the teachings of the Church as well as common sense long before the Magisterium officially condemned Eugenics.

Similarly, Chesterton's protest against artificial birth control foreshadows the Church's condemnation of unnatural contraception. As Pope Paul VI writes in *Humanae Vitae*, husbands and wives have a responsibility not only to themselves but also to God and their families as well as to society itself. "From this follows that they are not free to act as they choose in the service of transmitting life, as if it were wholly up to them to decide what is the right course to follow" (10.6). Specifically, the pope reiterates the Church's long-standing opposition to unnatural means of contraception.

We are obliged once more to declare that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely

excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children. Equally to be condemned, as the magisterium of the Church has affirmed on many occasions, is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary. [. . .] Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means. (14.1, 14.2)

Such actions are condemned because scientific, mechanical contraception poses the innate risk of reducing both man and woman to sexual objects. The use of contraception necessarily risks reducing a woman, in particular, to a “mere instrument for the satisfaction of [man’s] own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection” (17.1).

Furthermore drawing the connection between procreation, contraception, and eugenics, the Congregation writes:

*The child is not an object to which one has a right, nor can he be considered as an object of ownership: rather, a child is a gift, ‘the supreme gift’ and the most gratuitous gift of marriage, and is a living testimony of the mutual giving of his parents. For this reason, the child has the right, as already mentioned, to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents; and he also has the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception. (II.B.8.2)*

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly—as Bethany and Sam Trode, a Protestant couple who have recently recounted their own acceptance of natural means of conception—write: “With contraception, as with all of life, actions and intentions can’t easily be separated. What we do with our bodies, we also do with our souls” (28-9). This connection Chesterton clearly saw and thus condemned eugenics and birth control as inextricably bound together in the same life-denying philosophy.

In Chesterton's time, Eugenics centered particularly on the so-called feeble-minded of society, whom he affirmed as possessing no less freedom or dignity than all other human beings. As Alton points out, Chesterton saw "that what was truly feeble-minded was to base ethical decisions on something as vacuous as personal choice: 'To admire mere choice, is to refuse to choose', he wrote" ("Chesterton"). Opposed to a philosophical position that denied the worth of matter and focused instead on the mind, Chesterton saw in the feeble-minded what the Church today sees in the human embryo—the fundamental and essential worth and dignity of humanity, though perhaps not fully realized nor realizable. Chesterton thus foreshadows all scientific preying on the weak as well as the Church's role in protecting the defenseless. Additionally, Juan Leon has noticed Chesterton's connection to current discussions surrounding genetic issues. He connects Chesterton's *Eugenics and Other Evils* to the "new eugenics associated with the Human Genome Project, genetic counseling, genetic engineering, and (possible) human gene therapies" (30). Thus did Chesterton not only foresee the eugenic horrors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, even as James V. Schall also notes, the "errors that Chesterton saw in 1922 are far more popular and far more dangerous today than when he examined them. We actually practice many of them" (592). As Russell Sparkes writes, "It is becoming increasingly accepted that the relativism of the late Twentieth Century has resulted in a collapse of moral discourse [. . .] coupled with an extension of the powers of the State into areas that were formerly felt to be none of its business. Chesterton saw this coming in 1912" (128).



Chesterton's contribution was perhaps most remarkable for his genuinely dialogizing style of discourse. Schall declares, "I almost think Chesterton foresaw in thought and argument all the errors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before they happened in reality. But he always paid his opponent the compliment of taking his ideas seriously, even when he took them humorously" (590). Such dialogue is intrinsically related to the fundamental dignity of humankind and cannot be otherwise cultivated, as *Gaudium et Spes* makes clear. "[B]rotherly dialogue among men does not reach its perfection on the level of technical progress, but on the deeper level of interpersonal relationships. These demand a mutual respect for the full spiritual dignity of the person" (23.1). This sort of dialogue is not to occur chiefly between friends but with those of differing beliefs, as we have seen Chesterton so effectively demonstrate. "Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them" (*Gaudium* 28.1).

### *An Evaluation of Chesterton's Dialogue*

We have seen that Chesterton engaged in dialogue from his earliest years, indeed such dialogue energized his fiction and animated his literary criticism. The alleged weakness of his dialogical fiction is that it lacks the realism that prevailed in late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature. It can seem shallow and distanced from the "real world." Contemporary readers have little patience with the Edwardian philosophical novel; but this impatience reveals

more about current tastes and trends than the quality of Chesterton's fiction itself. Its great strength is that he is able to carry on a genuine dialogue by fictional means. His narratives are strengthened and enlivened by allowing the reader to enter dialogue with the viewpoints that the characters are themselves dialogizing.

Chesterton's dialogical method is less evident in his literary criticism, though its great strength is that he provides a model for theological reflection on literary texts. That his interpretation of literary texts is primarily polemical—as he attacks the Decadents and their pessimistic philosophy—may seem to undermine the dialogical achievement of his fiction. For example, in *Robert Louis Stevenson*, one of Chesterton's later critical works, Chesterton acclaims Stevenson for “challenging the President of the Suicide Club” (78-9). Yet the real animus behind his attack on the Decadents and the Impressionists—Monet, Renoir, Degas, Whistler, etc.—is that their work could encompass no other viewpoint than their own. It is noteworthy, therefore, that Chesterton praises the dialogical life that he finds at work in the creations of Watts, Stevenson, Dickens, and Browning. These four artists offer, in vastly different ways an optimistic philosophy of life which suggests that is at least implicitly dialogical because it insists that we dwell at the intersection of two worlds: the human and the divine. For the Decadents and impressionists, by contrast, we are entirely ensconced within this world alone, and thus there is no room for any real exchange or debate about how things might be radically other than they are.

The value of Chesterton's dialogical style is many-faceted. First, as we have already seen, Chesterton's ethical argument is no less applicable today than

when it was published as *Eugenics and Other Evils* in 1922. Though it went into eclipse for much of the twentieth century, eugenics has returned with a vengeance, cloaked now as it was then, in scientific jargon and unexamined presuppositions. Protestants who vehemently wage war against abortion would do well to see in Chesterton and the Vatican documents there is an undeniable connection between eugenics on the one hand, and abortion and contraception on the other. Additionally, Protestants of the Reformed type who might be offended by Chesterton's anti-Calvinism still cannot readily dismiss him because, as David Henreckson argues, Chesterton "equate[s] predestination with determinism because he supposed that it led to a fatalistic apathy and pessimism." Chesterton would have been pleased, therefore, that in Abraham Kuyper Calvinism did not become a source of pessimism but of an activist politics. In fact, Kuyper became president of the Netherlands and used his political power to defend the fundamental dignity and worth of every human being. Additionally, Chesterton's notion that salvation is essentially communal and moral offers a strong and needful antidote to the individualist, and pietistic understanding of Christianity in much Evangelical theology.

Second, Chesterton's style itself points to the necessity of dialogue. By affirming the presence of the "other," he opens conversation and thus allows the possibility of both communication and communion to emerge. Dialogue, as we have seen in Chesterton's work does not need to be endlessly open-ended. Chesterton himself believed that it must be concluded at some point, but this conclusion did not mean that he avoided engaging with others. Third, we find in Chesterton's dialogizing work a means of answering the nihilism and solipsism of

our own culture. Many Christians today are, like Chesterton, seeking for a concept of the world that is larger than the self and larger than all of the various conflicting intellectual ideas of our times. As Richard Gill declares, “Chesterton extracted himself from a youthful solipsism and found himself to be deeply at odds with what he perceived to be the dominant theories of the intellectual establishment” (203). Just as Chesterton returned to orthodoxy, so orthodox Christianity is relevant today over and against our own culture of death.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note first that Chesterton’s encounter with nihilism did not cause him to recoil in self-justification but to reject the philosophy of nihilism while embracing the nihilists, engaging and conversing with them. So we learn from Chesterton to dialogue with culture, but we also learn his antidote to nihilism is yet another form of dialogue—communion—communion with God and with each other.

While many will contest Chesterton’s interpretation of the Impressionists as nihilistic, there seems little doubt that he was right to detect nihilism behind the work of the eugenicists. As Christine Rosen points out with regard to the Nuremberg Trials, “This fundamental problem of human dignity clashing with the danger of ultimate moral nihilism emerged clearly at the Nuremberg Trials. The prosecution, with no body of positive law upon which to base its judgments, unable to appeal to the scientifically discredited notion of natural law, simply asserted human dignity as a tradition of Western liberalism” (363). If the prosecutors at Nuremberg could not mount a stronger defense to combat the

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<sup>1</sup>In his Encyclical Letter, *Evangelium Vitae* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1995), Pope John Paul II has proposed the theology of a “new culture of human life” in stark contrast to the prevailing culture of death.

horrors of the Holocaust, then certainly we are only the weaker as a culture still largely unable to provide substantive answers to the nihilism inherent in the latter-day manifestations of eugenics. On 25 March 1922 Chesterton wrote concerning *Eugenics and Other Evils*, “Nothing would please me more than to suppose that the very title of my book will be unintelligible fifty years hence. I am happy to say that I think it quite likely” (“Defending My Opinions” 345). Quite the opposite has occurred. And so we still need Chesterton to remind us of the evil of eugenics and the necessity of genuine dialogue as the best means for combating it.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## Outlines of the Novels Discussed in Chapter Four

*Outline of The Man Who Was Thursday*

The story begins when two poets, Lucian Gregory—the “red-haired revolutionary”—and Gabriel Syme—the poet of law, order, and respectability—encounter each other in Saffron Park (37-38). Syme accuses the anarchist Gregory of the greatest evil, fraudulence. In order to convince Syme that he is indeed an anarchist, Gregory invites Syme to attend a meeting of the Central Anarchist Council. The Council, composed of seven members, each bears the name of a day of the week. The President of the Council is called Sunday, and Gregory is slated to become the newest Thursday. Moments before Syme enters the meeting and moments before the vote to replace the old Thursday with the newest Thursday is cast, Gregory and Syme respectively exchange secrets that must remain so: Gregory is not guilty of fraudulent behavior: he is an anarchist; Syme is not an uninterested party: he is a policeman, a detective.

At the meeting of the council, in a reversal of expectations wherein Syme declares the true nature of anarchy, Syme rather than Gregory is voted the new Thursday. At a breakfast meeting of the European Dynamiters the following morning, Syme is introduced to the other six members of the council. It is at this meeting that the unveiling of undercover agents begins in full, leading to several chases. At the breakfast meeting, Sunday exposes Gogol as a spy: he too is a member of the philosophical police force working undercover as Tuesday. The

chapters that follow uncover a vast conspiracy. As various members of the council chase each other, the remaining four members of the council, excluding the President, expose their true identity. Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday are all revealed as double agents working as undercover philosophical policemen. As it turns out, all six policemen have been recruited by the same man sitting alone in a darkened room. When the six realize that they are all on the same side, they fastidiously seek the remaining member of the council, Sunday, the President.

In their meeting with Sunday, he reveals that he is the self-same man who recruited each of them for the philosophical police force. Upon revealing that bit of at once important and puzzling news, Sunday flees the scene, and another pursuit begins—this time the policemen pursue Sunday. In a chase full of fantastical elements, Sunday drops personal riddles pertaining to each of the policemen and, among other things, flees on the back of an elephant only to exchange the elephant for a hot air balloon. Having escaped from the philosophers, Sunday leaves them to discuss their impressions of the figure in the dark room whom they now know to be Sunday. As they discuss Sunday, they encounter a mysterious old man who invites them to ride in individual carriages. The philosophers are taken to apartments designed specifically for them and are dressed in royal robes depicting the events of creation which correspond to their council names.

While the philosophers enjoy a banquet festival of utmost splendor, the anarchist poet Lucian Gregory, nearly forgotten by this point in the plot, reappears to accuse both Gabriel Syme and Sunday of creating a gigantic hoax



that required others to suffer while they remain unharmed. Though Syme's response is lengthy, Sunday answers Gregory's question with a question: "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" The narrator then describes Syme's state of mind as that of one who has just awoken from a dream. Syme finds himself still in the presence of Lucian Gregory; but Syme and his relationship to Gregory have been significantly altered. The novel concludes with Syme gazing longingly upon Gregory's sister Rosamond with whom Syme had shared a pleasant exchange early in the first chapter.

#### *Outline of The Napoleon of Notting Hill*

*The Napoleon of Notting Hill* begins with a rather lengthy narration about prophecy to frame the novel's 1984 setting. As he poetically puts it at the beginning of chapter two, "Very few words are needed to explain why London, a hundred years hence, will be very like it is now." Thus does this futuristic novel not look anything like other futuristic novels of the Edwardian era. As John Coates notes, the entire novel is combating the "spiritual malaise" at work in London in 1984. The people of London have devoided themselves of all "superstitions" and have exchanged democracy for despotism giving power to one Auberon Quin, who dresses and commands that all dress colorfully and lavishly, full of pomp without circumstance. Quin rules as King quite peacefully until his encounter with Adam Wayne, the provost of Notting Hill, who actually believes in the King's pompous joke. No one thus far had taken the King's mandate for lavish dress and decorum seriously but had simply capitulated to his druthers. What follows is the conflict that ensues when Wayne takes Quin seriously.

Eventually, Wayne must defend Notting Hill from the King's men; but the King himself, never tiring of a good joke, switches sides and fights for Notting Hill. The King embeds himself as a journalist in the battle and sends back reports written in various styles of prose. Notting Hill prevails, but some twenty years further hence, a conversation between Quin and Wayne suggests that neither "the pure fanatic" nor "the pure satirist" can either "win." In the end, Chesterton prophesies, it is the combination of the two in the common man that will prevail. The conflict is resolved in Chestertonian fashion through paradox.

#### *Outline of The Ball and the Cross*

*The Ball and the Cross*, published in 1909, is the story of an odd encounter between Evan MacIan, a devout Scottish Roman Catholic, and James Turnbull, also of Scottish descent, the editor of a London newspaper entitled, "The Atheist." While the story begins with an exchange between Lucifer and a monk named Michael, the narrative follows the sequence of events that occurs after MacIan breaks the window of Turnbull's publishing shop. MacIan has been offended by Turnbull's publication of "The Mesopotamian Mythology and its Effects on the Syriac Folk Lore" because it insulted Mary, the Mother of God. The two agree to a sword duel to settle their differences and work throughout the course of the novel to conduct the duel. What follows is a series of interruptions preventing the two from actually dueling and being forced rather to duel verbally through dialogue, MacIan defending the cross and Turnbull defending the ball or the world. In the end, MacIan recognizes that there 'must be some round earth to plant the cross upon,' but Turnbull is not easily convinced that the ball needs the

cross (247). It is not until the final pages of the novel that Turnbull “abandon[s] the certainties of materialism” (257). What emerges then throughout the novel is the notion that neither MacIan’s nor Turnbull’s philosophy is sufficient alone, but both are dependent on the other to be fully realized.

### *Outline of Manalive*

*Manalive*, published in 1912, is the latest of Chesterton’s novels examined herein. It has been called the “acid test of a Chestertonian” for it is perhaps the best fictionalized account of Chesterton’s passion for life (qtd. in Benson 24). Innocent Smith, the main character of the novel, is a seemingly insane criminal accused of polygamy, theft, and attempted murder. However, the trial that ensues reveals, in epistolary fashion, that rather than a polygamist Innocent has merely wedded his wife numerous times, that rather than a thief Innocent has merely broken into his own home, and that rather than a murderer Innocent has merely shot his firearm in the direction of one who has suggested that he wishes to die. Innocent Smith makes the profound discovery that Chesterton himself made—that he is a *man alive*. Thus he seeks to fully enjoy the life that surrounds him and awaken a similar wonder in those with whom he comes in contact.

## APPENDIX B

*The Character of Sunday in The Man Who Was Thursday*

The character of Sunday, the President of the European Dynamiters Club, possesses troubling complexities for the reader. His character has been treated extensively elsewhere, but Chesterton's own comments on Sunday are quite instructive. Indeed, Sunday is allegorical and particularly confusing if read as symbolic of God. Chesterton stated in his *Autobiography*:

I have often been asked what I mean by the monstrous pantomime ogre who was called Sunday in that story; and some have suggested, and in one sense not untruly, that he was meant for a blasphemous version of the Creator. But the point is that the whole story is a nightmare of things, not as they are, but as they seemed to the young half-pessimist of the '90s; and the ogre who appears brutal but is also cryptically benevolent is not so much God, in the sense of religion or irreligion, but rather Nature as it appears to the pantheist, whose pantheism is struggling out of pessimism. So far as the story had any sense in it, it was meant to begin with the picture of the world at its worst and to work towards the suggestion that the picture was not so black as it was already painted. I explained that the whole thing was thrown out in the nihilism of the '90s in the dedicatory lines which I wrote to my friend Bentley, who had been through the same period and problems (98-99).

Nature appears cruel and capricious. Witold Ostrowski puts it succinctly, "Syme's tremendous question is not answered by Nature, but by Christ who is, according to Christian faith, both God and a Man. And being, as a man, subject to all the conditions of Nature and the miseries of human social and political history, suffered like his creation, though sinless and blameless" (150).

Elsewhere Chesterton writes of Sunday:

People have asked me whom I mean by Sunday. Well, I think, on the whole, and allowing for the fact that he is a person in a

tale—I think you can take him to stand for Nature as distinguished from God. Huge, boisterous, full of vitality, dancing with a hundred legs, bright with the glare of the sun, and at first sight, somewhat regardless of us and our desires.

There is a phrase used at the end, spoken by Sunday: “Can ye drink from the cup that I drink of?” which seems to mean that Sunday is God. That is the only serious note in the book, the face of Sunday changes, you tear off the mask of Nature and you find God. (Chesterton, *Annotated* 279)

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