

feasibility studies for, and in the establishment and staffing of, new enterprises (in which the state may choose to become a financial partner), and in social and industrial research, over which,

First of all, [there must be] a superior organism on the government level, for the planification or co-ordination of scientific and technical national policy, which defines global and estimated necessities, distributes resources to different areas, co-ordinates research institutes and controls their production, promulgates the exploitations of

the results of the national effort and organizes the transference of technology with other nations, especially with those of Europe and Latin America.

Oh, wow! There is here a terrible afflatus; there is a terrible hubris.

Not reading likely to appeal to Pepe the Mechanic or Paco the Clerk, moreover. As sexy propaganda for the *Alianza Popular*, its "white paper" is a flop. It staggers under the rhetoric of the pedagogue. Ideologically speaking, no more bureaucratic centralizing of the energies of the society can be

imagined, and nowhere is the incompatibility of such activism by government with individual freedom recognized. Tierno Galván, the urbane Marxist mayor of Madrid, expressed to me his conviction that in Spain all political wings are compressing on a center. What he was voicing is his conviction that the Marxist prescription has won the day. Hard to deny. The matter with the AP is Fraga Iribarne, one can conclude. But Fraga is no more than a symbolization of the intellectual flaw which resides in the

philosophical acceptance by the right-wing of a programmatic statist solution to all that ails mankind.

It's sad. Many fine, fine people are working their hearts out for the AP. It is the only game in town. From a reading of the party's literature, an American conservative would say that an electoral victory of *Alianza Popular* would be other than a nightmare only by comparison with a worse alternative. What is evident, however, is that under its present leader there's not a chance of this coming about. □

## EMINENTOES



### THE EVERLASTING BORE

Richard Brookhiser

It is rash to take a bead on Gilbert K. Chesterton. He left a body of work as vast as—well, as his body: dozens of books, most of them out of print, dozens more articles and essays, moldering unretrieved in the pages of extinct London newspapers. Not even the most washed-in-the-blood Chesterton fan can have read them all.

Not that he suffers. He had fame, honor, and love in his lifetime. He has them still, and deserves them. But it is a pity, when so many of his pages are so well done, that he should continue to be admired for what is weak and shoddy.

I have only skimmed Chesterton's politics, and the historical work he wrote to buttress it. I have always figured that, whenever I want to sample Distributism—that curious three-pronged attack on capitalism, the state, and the post-medieval world—I can get it neat in *The Servile State*, by Chesterton's friend and political mentor, Hilaire Belloc. (And when Belloc is pouring, stand back—there is not an ice cube, or a lime twist, to soften the brew.) Nor do I think it fair to cite, to Chesterton's discredit, his ambivalent reaction to Mussolini. He went to Italy only eight years into the Fascist regime. Given the current fashion for distinguishing stages in *Il Duce's* degradation, Chesterton's puzzled first impression may not now seem so cock-eyed. Many an early pilgrim to Stalin, Mao, Castro (and Hitler) should have

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been as modest as Chesterton was about Benito.

Chesterton fails worst not in these mundane affairs, but in those works he would have considered most important—his explications of Christianity and Catholicism (the two are interchangeable with him).


His most famous book along this line (or any of his many lines) is probably *The Man Who Was Thursday*. The idea is simple: The members of an anarchist conspiracy turn out, one after the other, to be detectives in disguise, while the leader, who recruited them all, turns out to be God, or someone very like Him. The purpose of the charade, the para-deity explains at the end, is to put the police in the position of rebels and criminals—to allow the defenders of order to feel "the courage of the dynamiter."

It is a provoking idea. Unfortunately the story which is meant to carry it is dreadful. *The Man Who Was Thursday* has to be one of the worst books Chesterton wrote; it is by far the worst I have read. There is not a character that comes alive, not an incident that moves, not a description that successfully describes. Chesterton emphasizes over and over the nightmarish quality of his events—a sure sign of trouble. We don't want to be told that something is a nightmare; we have to be made to believe it. Chesterton knows where he wants our emotions to go, but they don't budge an inch. He can only shout and wave at us, like a traffic cop. The problem is undoubtedly the prose. H.P. Lovecraft is more

definite and direct. You could swear Chesterton had been paid by the word. And what words. They seem almost to have been chosen by lot; there is frequently no other apparent principle of selection. There were moments, the first, and only, time I read it, so vague and confusing that I literally could not

figure out what was supposed to be going on.

The style of Chesterton's Christian polemics is better. A little. It is modeled on the old song about the Duke of York:



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The grand old Duke of York,  
He had ten thousand men.  
He marched them up the hill,  
And he marched them down again.

Every sentence comes bundled in a neat pair. Laboriously, the first sentence creaks up to the summit of some point; laboriously, the second clanks down the other side. Chesterton is like Mark Twain's description of an

Englishman trying to tell a joke—nodding, winking, nudging in the ribs, enveloping the punch line in a cloud of self-congratulation. The punch line may be good; but even when it is tremendous, we can hear it rumbling a mile away. These labored sentences are marshaled into paragraphs even more labored than the sentences themselves. Sometimes the carefully stacked symmetries and paradoxes

blaze, like a well-made fire. Mostly they collapse in cold, dismal heaps. The cumulative effect of stretches of *Orthodoxy*, and longer stretches of *The Everlasting Man*, is intensely tiring, like being force-fed unchewable candy.

The tawdry rhetoric accompanies tawdry thought. Chesterton's characteristic argument is that faith in his faith will have good consequences

*a, b, and c; or that it will not have bad consequences x, y, and z. Is belief in God absurd? In fact, any other belief leads to tyranny and chaos. Is the social life of Catholic countries too much run by priests? It is precisely because of priests that the stout peasants of France and Ireland are not dominated by squires or millionaires. Do Catholics drink too much? Beer is good. Catholics/Christians build better nations, sing better songs, and in every way lead happier, sturdier, and more wholesome lives. In a later generation, he might have called it The Power of Papal Thinking.*

These sorts of arguments are not frivolous. People regularly ignore, or attend to, the Christian message because of incidentals and effects. But after the misapprehensions have been swept away, what do we do then?

Chesterton won't say. He is worth comparing, in this respect, with the other great popular Christian writer of the twentieth century, C. S. Lewis. In all Lewis's works, whatever the form—the tales of Narnia or *Perelandra*, *The Four Loves* or *The Screwtape Letters*—one insistent injunction appears: You *must choose* the Christian life. Because the God who created shrews and continents, the Periodic Table and the Magellanic Clouds, designed it for your fulfillment (and you for its); because He allowed Himself to be tortured to death so that you could have the choice; because harmonies you cannot conceive or horrors you could not bear wait upon your decision. Chesterton bellows a hundred instances in the same tone of voice. Lewis repeats, with all the modes at his command—bedtime stories, science fiction, academic essays, demonic correspondence—the same message. Chesterton addresses a classroom, or a rally. Lewis addresses you. Chesterton charts the world. Lewis grasps your lapel.

Is there a sectarian explanation of this contrast between the public and the personal—a difference of focus between Catholicism and its Protestant offspring? Chesterton might have thought so. In an essay comparing John Bunyan and William Langland, author of the medieval poem *Piers Plowman*, Chesterton decides—surprise!—that Catholics write better books, and praises Langland for all his own shortcomings. Poor Bunyan—all he managed was to deposit Christian inside the Heavenly City. But Langland gives us a fine speech on the State of England.

So what should we read Chesterton for? The first reason, it seems to me, is his knack for controversy. A real live antagonist concentrates his attention.

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When there is a job to be done (Chesterton was, after all, a working journalist) he settles to it.

When the target is contemptible, the results can be hilarious. F. E. Smith, the Tory politician, wandered in front of the gun sights with the suggestion that a bill to disestablish the Church of Wales "shocked the conscience" of Christian Europe. Chesterton fired off a little ode entitled "Antichrist."

Are they clinging to their crosses,  
F. E. Smith,  
Where the Breton boat-fleet tosses,  
Are they, Smith?  
Do they, fasting, tramping, bleeding,  
Wait the news from this our city?  
Groaning "That's the Second  
Reading!"  
Hissing "There is still Committee!"  
If the voice of Cecil falters,  
If McKenna's point has pith,  
Do they tremble for their altars?  
Do they, Smith?

And so on, through three delicious stanzas. It's a wonder Smith didn't assume an alias.

But Chesterton's great talent in controversy is salvaging. If there is anything worthwhile in his enemies, he will distinguish it, retrieve it, burnish it lovingly. He has to be one of the fairest fighters who ever stepped in a ring. When his opposite numbers are not contemporaries, as in *Heretics*, but thinkers, or entire philosophies, of the past, the results (for instance, the sections on paganism in *The Everlasting Man*) are worth volumes of cultural history. The power of sympathy helped make him an acute literary critic as well. It may be, as W.H. Auden observed in a rather catty forward to a volume of Chestertoniana, that there were things he simply didn't notice. But whatever he read at all carefully, he read from the inside. By a happy chance, the things he liked best—Shakespeare, Dickens—are also the best things.

Chesterton's sympathy is everywhere supported by a strong, comprehensive view of the world. The only critic who surpasses, or matches, him in this is Samuel Johnson. Many pundits besides Chesterton know when an idea is internally consistent, or when iambic pentameter flows musically. Few know as well how men live, by bread, or otherwise:

The word "signal box" is unpoetical. But the thing signal-box is not unpoetical; it is a place where men, in an agony of vigilance, light blood-red and sea-green fires to keep other men from death. That is the plain, genuine description of what it is; the prose only comes in with what it is called. The word "pillar-box" is unpoetical. But the thing "pillar-box" is not unpoetical; it is the place to which friends and lovers commit their messages, conscious that when they have done so they are sacred, and not to be touched, not only by

others, but even (religious touch!) by themselves. Posting a letter and getting married are among the few things left that are entirely romantic; for to be entirely romantic a thing must be irrevocable. . . . All these things were given to you poetical. It is only by a long and elaborate process of literary effort that you have made them prosaic.

This, from an essay on Rudyard

Kipling. His view of the world rested on his religion. But his faith in fact finds better expression in his non-religious books. Chesterton's books on the church can descend to the chatter of an Edwardian debating society; his books on his fellow Edwardians—*Heretics*, or the appreciation of Shaw—rise to the sublime.

Occasionally Chesterton turned, not

to an adversary or an artist, but to a saint. In his books on Thomas Aquinas or Francis of Assisi, the circle closes. The mental and stylistic mannerisms fall away, or lose their power to irritate. Instead of touting Christianity's effects, he shows them in the mind of one subject, and the heart of another. He reports on God.

It's good, front-page stuff. □

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# BOOK REVIEWS

History can often be usefully illuminated by studying the development of a particular concept, in both its theoretical and practical forms. David Landes is not the first scholar to use the measurement of time as his angle of entry into world history. Not that his book attempts to deal with the whole of this enormous subject: His concern is essentially with the invention and improvement of mechanical clocks. But he necessarily touches upon much wider aspects of time-measurement which raise fundamental questions about human societies, and it is therefore a pity that his book is not better organized. He begins with a long section on the huge water-clocks, or clepsydras, which the Chinese built in the early Middle Ages for astronomical purposes. He asks why these marvels proved a dead end, from a technological viewpoint, and answers that it was a mixture of bureaucracy, state control of invention, and the lack of a commercial use for accurate chronology. Then he moves on to the use of clocks in medieval Europe.

It would have been more logical to start with the ancient Egyptians, who in their muddled pragmatic way were the real innovators in time-measurement. They developed both the clepsydra and the gnomon, or sun-clock, around the middle of the second millennium B.C., and examples of both can be seen in the British Museum. The Oriental Institute in Chicago also has part of an ebony bar which probably belonged to a machine for charting the stars and dates from not much later. Egyptian night star-clocks, examples of which were often painted onto the ceilings of tombs, became the basis of the 24-hour system, which was then calibrated on the clepsydras and gnomons. When the Greeks built Alexandria, they adopted the 24-hour system and the corresponding 365-day year, and it was the Alexandrian astronomer Sosigenes who later produced the standard "Julian" calendar for Caesar—in use, with modifications, throughout the world today.

Why did the Egyptians not push their technology further? Probably because chronometry was an arcane monopoly of the priests; it was something confined to the hieratic script and excluded from the demotic of the trading community. Yet there may be a connection between Egypt

Paul Johnson's most recent book is *Modern Times* (Harper & Row).

## REVOLUTION IN TIME: CLOCKS AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD

David S. Landes/Harvard University Press/\$20.00

Paul Johnson

and later Western technology. Landes rightly points to the critical part played by Latin monasteries in the strict enforcement of daily time-divisions, both for prayer and work, and so in the emergence of clocks. The notion of clerical communal farms originated in Egypt, where they took the form of perpetual funerary temples, operating to precise prayer-schedules and probably work-practices too. The first Christian monks came from this region, and when the movement spread to Italy it was galvanized and regulated by the great rule of St. Benedict, the basis for all subsequent monastic routines. In contrast to monks of the Eastern Orthodox rite, who were often ideorythmic, each determining his own prayer-and-work timetable, the Benedictines were made to follow strict communal schedules both for purposes of moral discipline and to enable their farms to pay. Convinced that idleness led straight to hell, and obsessed by the need to employ

time in God's service, St. Benedict was the ultimate progenitor of modern capitalism. Certainly the Benedictines were the first to develop reliable water-clocks in the West, and the Cistercians, who evolved from the Benedictine order about 1100 and rapidly became the most successful agricultural innovators in Europe, ruthlessly exploited the advantages of strict timekeeping in raising the productivity of large work forces.

Almost inevitably, then, the first true mechanical clocks, which appeared in the thirteenth century, were made for ecclesiastical foundations. Landes is a bit vague about how and when they emerged. It is true that the earliest references do not clearly differentiate between water-clocks and mechanical ones powered by weights. But the evidence seems plain that they were first installed in cathedrals, which led almost all Western technologies at this time. Cathedrals had large clerical communities organized like monks (in-

deed in England half the cathedrals were monasteries) and they carried out elaborate daily timetables of services. The first clocks date from the 1280s, mainly in England, and it is no accident that the earliest to survive was installed in 1386 at Salisbury, famous for the strictness and regularity of its liturgy. It is an impressive, if cumbersome, piece of work, but nothing by comparison to the spectacular device installed six years later at Wells, probably by the same bishop. The Wells clock is the most elaborate piece of machinery to come down to us from the Middle Ages and includes not only a moon-clock but a mechanical giant called Jack Blandifer who strikes the hours by drumming his wooden heels on the bells. Blandifer is much better value than the famous crowing cock at Strasbourg Cathedral, though visitors ought to know that hardly any of his mechanism consists of the original parts.

Once Landes gets past the hurdle of the first mechanical clock, his narrative becomes more satisfactory, and the rest of his book is a vivid and fascinating summary of how these clocks were progressively perfected until the quartz revolution made the notion of mechanized timekeeping obsolescent. It is no accident, of course, that this technical progress moved *pari passu* with the emergence of industrial capitalism; no accident, either, that capitalism developed first in Christian Europe. For Christianity, unlike the cyclical religions of the Orient, is a linear time religion, moving historically from Creation to Last Judgment. So of course is Judaism, but Christianity has a much more emphatic eschatology which is central to its Creed (some of the most famous Jewish formulations do not include the Messiah-coming as an essential article of faith). So for Christianity, time is of the essence: "Thou knowest not the day nor the hour . . ." Time is capital given by God to every soul, to be well spent and returned to Him with interest at the final reckoning. The urge to calculate its passing was thus a strong one among Christians, and during the later Middle Ages a large proportion of the available technical skills and resources of Christendom was devoted to improving clockwork.

The first great advance came about 1400 with the creation of a workable spring-driven mechanism, a device whose effectiveness was enormously

