

Beresford, D. V. 2001. Chesterton and Science - Why More is Better, in "The Many Sides of G. K. Chesterton", ed. Dale Ahlquist, published proceedings of the American Chesterton Society Conference, June 15-18, 2000, St. Paul, Minnesota, pp. 55-70.

### Chesterton and Science, Why More is Better

This rather cryptic title captures quite nicely my thesis, which is that Chesterton never criticized the study of science as such, but only criticized the belief that everything could be reduced to science or understood by science. This is the meaning of his many criticisms of science, he is criticizing that view of reality which admits science alone, and is thus an impoverished understanding of reality. Simply put, reality includes the world of science as a subset. The mistake is to equate the smaller reality of the created material world, which science rightly can shed light on, with the whole reality which includes the moral world, as well as the origin of all reality, God himself.

I would first like to give my background. I am currently working on a Ph.D. in evolutionary ecology, studying the behaviour of stable flies. What I really do is to count flies, dissect flies, and collect flies on dairy farms, and collect and count the mites that live on those flies. The flies breed in cow dung, and the mites breed in cow dung, and I consequently spend a great deal of my time researching in cow dung. I am therefore uniquely placed to speak about science.

In my studies, one thing that I have noticed is that science is thin. I do not know how else to explain this sentiment, except perhaps with an example. I can reduce much of the life history of stable flies to numbers, and have made many drawings of the different stages in the life cycle of stable flies and mites. These things help me uncover new and interesting facts about stable flies, as I proceed with various statistical tests and measurements. Yet up against a live fly, my data and my drawings seem to be a very thin representation of the real thing.

As a further example, consider the opening line of Blake's poem on the Tiger: "Tyger, Tyger, burning bright." They capture the reality of the tiger better than any ecological study that I have ever read. One can sense the living tiger in these words. Of course, the poem does not tell us where tigers are to be found, or what they eat, or how long their gestation period is, the scientific literature will give us that information, but one can picture the very living being that is a tiger, or at least get closer to it than any scientific study can. In other words, tigers are bigger than the scientific understanding of tigers, and the poetic understanding of tigers adds immeasurably to the overall vision of this creature, with both together still far from the real living thing.

There are two ways of keeping two things in proportion, by making one part smaller, or making the other part bigger. An understandable tendency in dealing with the exaggerated place that science has in our world is to cut it down to size. I suggest that Chesterton did not do this, but insisted instead on the largeness of the rest of reality. In *The Man Who Was Thursday*, this is the meaning of much of the mystery in that novel, and our trouble is that we are used to correcting the picture by reducing one part rather than enlarging the others part. So, with the two poets in the novel, the poet of order and the poet of disorder, it is easy to see the error of the anarchist poet Lucien Gregory, and that the world view of the

other poet, Gabriel Syme, the advocate of order is sound as far as it goes. Yet Syme's understanding cannot cope with the reality of chasing Sunday as he rides an elephant through London, and I think it is the elephant itself that is too much for him. The elephant in the zoo is perfectly within his comprehension, but the elephant on the loose is far too great for his world view to handle. In this, Syme has a scientific mind — we see this as he praises the smooth running of trains and the like.

It is not that Syme is wrong, it is that his vision of the world is too thin, his understanding of order cannot cope with order run amuck. As such, he lives in a nightmare, the nightmare of a narrowing world. We see this same narrowness in Chesterton's fictional scientists. The man who danced on one leg in *The Club of Queer Trades*; the astronomer, Dr. Green, who Chesterton describes as a monomaniac in *Tales of the Long Bow*. Dr. Warner and Arthur Inglewood from *Manalive*, the first of whom is great surgeon and second of whom is obsessed with photography. In each of these characters, Chesterton's points out for us that their science cannot answer any questions of purpose.

What is interesting is that the various scientists who do have their vision of the world enlarged promptly go and get married. In Syme's instance, he gets married at the end of the book, after his nightmare is over. For Prof Green, after he falls in love with the farmer's daughter his seriousness about his astronomic theory falls away from him. Inglewood gets engaged and his photography becomes his hobby, not his obsession. Dr. Warner thinks that Inglewood is mad because he wants to get married, and is subsequently diagnosed by the reformed cynic Michael Moon as a man who has been dead for years.

Syme the poet of order, whom I claim had the scientist's instinct for searching for patterns of order in the world, did not cease to marvel at the order of trains arriving on time, but I can tell you that his house would be filled with the disorder of life once they began to have children. Professor Green did not cease to believe in his physics, but his physics were not big enough to encompass his expanded reality of falling in love with his future wife. The real world is good, existence is good, and the evidence of that goodness is that the real world is brimming over with fruitfulness. There is in fact, no such thing as a sterile environment in nature; at least on this planet. And even outer space, that great vacuum which is by definition the ultimate sterile environment, is so profoundly beautiful that it is inseparable from romance.

What is Chesterton trying to tell us here? I think that he is pointing out for us that the real issue that we must choose between is whether life is good or not. This question cannot be answered by science, the evidence of science is neutral on this matter, for it is out of science's province. As a result, any answers science gives to the meaning of existence, or the question of whether existence is good, are sterile answers. The vision of reality that science gives us is narrow, like a diagram of an insect, which is fine as long as scientists don't claim that the diagram is reality itself.

The trouble is that in embracing the sterile vision of the world that science offers us, our culture has embraced that sterility as a positive good. The scientific family in the scientific town, in the scientific world, these horrors were the target of Chesterton's pen, for these are all sterile things. Chesterton's solution is not the anti-scientific family, but the real family in a real town in a real world: marriage, children, gardens, cauliflowers and cabbages, wine and beer and cheese and drinking songs. It is not a question of good vs bad science, for Arthur Inglewood was every bit as good a scientist as Warner, but whether there is only science, which is why Warner was a prig, and Arthur was not.

A good example of the priggishness of science concerns elephants, fittingly enough. In Kenya,

scientists shoot elephants with birth control darts in order to prevent the elephants from becoming overpopulated and destroying the forests. In this same area poachers are shot on sight by game wardens. Field stations and birth control give the entire program a scientific tone. This isn't bad science, this is scientism pure and simple, an example of a political decision buttressed by the trappings of science to give it legitimacy, elevating science to the level of a religion, or at least a philosophy, in the process.

To recap, I maintain that it is neither an accident, nor a trivial consideration, but rather of the very essence of Chesterton's understanding of the place of science in the world that his fictional scientists almost all escape the mania of scientism by getting married. In fact, I suggest that when we understand why Chesterton had his scientists get married, we will understand Chesterton's mind on science and scientists.

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A heretic is someone who sees a reality isolated from its context — that is what a heresy is, choosing one facet of reality and ignoring the others, for a heretic is by definition one who chooses. This is not Chesterton, it is an idea that has existed as long as there have been heretics. The heretic is really someone who is possessed by an *idea fixe*. We all of us, certainly I do, have a point of view, but this is simply to say the world is larger than we can encompass within our heads. Heretics like to shrink the world into systems to eliminate the untidy loose ends that opposing ideas can bring. Thus, in *The Catholic and Conversion*, Chesterton describes a typical heretic thus: "A Quaker is a Catholic obsessed with the Catholic idea of gentle simplicity and truth. But when he made it mean it is a lie to say 'you' and an act of idolatry to take off your hat to a lady, it is not too much to say that whether or not he had a hat off, he certainly had a tile loose." <sup>1</sup>

I am dwelling upon Chesterton's view of heresy to build the case that for Chesterton, it is not the world that science revealed that is the problem, but the belief that science alone could reveal anything about the world. Science used to claim that nature could be reduced to deterministic laws, but to conclude that everything is determinism is madness. Science now teaches us that nature cannot be described by deterministic laws, only probabilities, but to then conclude that there are no fixed things, only floating likelihoods is equally mad. Science has revealed that plants and animals adapt to their habitat as it changes over time, and has called this evolution. To conclude that all human institutions are therefore subject to the trial and error of evolution is madness in the extreme. But to insist that because science cannot explain everything it can therefore not explain anything is just as narrow. The heretic decides which part of reality to view, and then denies the remainder. Anti-scientism is just as heretical as scientism is. If there is one single theme that connects Chesterton's ideas, it is that the universe is always a bigger place, and the measure of one's intellectual health is whether or not one's world is shrinking.

Thus, in *Orthodoxy* we read:

The general fact is simple. Poetry is sane because it floats in an infinite sea; reason seeks to cross the infinite sea, and so make it finite. The result is mental exhaustion. To accept everything is an exercise, to understand everything is a strain. The poet only desires exaltation and expansion, a world to stretch himself into. The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it

is his head that splits. And if great reasoners are often maniacal, it is equally true that maniacs are great reasoners. The madman's explanation of a thing is always complete, and often in a purely rational sense satisfactory. Nevertheless he is wrong. But if we attempt to trace his error in exact terms, we shall not find it quite so easy as we had supposed. Perhaps the nearest we can get to expressing it is to say this: that his mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not so large. There is such a thing as a narrow universality; there is such a thing as a small and cramped eternity; you may see it in many modern religions. Now, speaking quite externally and empirically, we may say that the strongest and most unmistakable mark of madness is this combination between a logical completeness and a spiritual contraction. The lunatic's theory explains a large number of things, but does not explain them in a large way. I mean, that if you or I were dealing with a mind that was growing morbid, we should be chiefly concerned not so much to give it arguments as to give it air, to convince it that there was something cleaner and cooler outside the suffocation of a single argument. "How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos, scattering the stars like spangles, and leave you in the open, free like other men to look up as well as down. I have described at length my vision of the maniac for this reason: that just as I am affected by the maniac, so I am affected by most modern thinkers. That unmistakable mood or note that I hear from Hanwell, I hear from half the chairs of science and seats of learning today. They are universal only in the sense that they take one thin explanation and carry it very far. But a pattern can stretch forever and still be a small pattern. They see a chess-board white on black, and if the universe is paved with it, it is still white on black. Like the lunatic, they cannot alter their standpoint; they cannot make a mental effort and suddenly see it black on white. Like a lunatic, they cannot alter their standpoint." <sup>2</sup>

In light of this, consider the following statements by some of the leading biologists of the past century.

Huxley: "Out of the darkness of prehistoric ages man emerges with the marks of his lowly origin strong upon him. He is a brute, only more intelligent than the other brutes, a blind prey to impulses, which as often as not lead him to destruction; a victim to endless illusions, which make his mental existence a terror and a burden, and fill his physical life with barren toil and battle." <sup>3</sup>

Darwin: "To think of the progress of millions of years, with every continent swarming with good and enlightened men all ending in this, and with no fresh start until this our planetary system has again been converted into a red-hot gas." <sup>4</sup>

Stephen J. Gould: "We are the offspring of history, and must establish our own paths in this most diverse and interesting of conceivable universes — one indifferent to our suffering, and therefore offering us maximal freedom to thrive, or to fail, in our own chosen way." <sup>5</sup>

Now compare these to Chesterton: "I invented a rudimentary and makeshift theory of my own. It

was substantially this; that even mere existence, reduced to its most primary limits, was extraordinary enough to be exciting. Anything was magnificent as compared with nothing. Even if the very daylight were a dream, it was a day-dream; it was not a nightmare . . . . Or, if it was a nightmare, it was an enjoyable nightmare.”<sup>6</sup>

What we have here are two different views of reality, either it is good or it is not. This is not a new problem. As Addison wrote a century earlier:

I was afraid of being overlooked amidst the immensity of nature, and lost among that infinite variety of creatures, which in all probability swarm through all these immeasurable regions of matter. In order to recover myself from this mortifying thought, I considered that it took its rise from those narrow conceptions, which we are apt to entertain of the divine nature. In this consideration of God's Almighty omnipresence and omniscience every uncomfortable thought vanishes. He cannot but regard every thing that has being, especially such of his creatures who fear they are not regarded by him. For it is impossible that he should overlook any of his creatures, so we may be confident that he regards with an eye of mercy those who endeavor to recommend themselves to his notice, and in an unfeigned humility of heart think themselves unworthy that he should be mindful of them.<sup>7</sup>

I think that this is the explanation of the healthy instinct that is repulsed by evolution and Darwin's survival of the fittest, that it can catch hold of the mind and make it incapable of seeing anything except its own narrow vision of constant purposeless change. This is essentially a problem of a small cosmos, an idea that has fettered the mind. And, as we have seen, Chesterton's prescription is not to argue against the rationale of such an illness, but to open a window. The illness does not lie in science, or in Darwinism for that matter, or evolution, or any scientific pursuit, but in the narrowness that comes when the idea takes over the mind entirely.

Therefore, it is no accident that all of Chesterton's fictional scientists, and intellectuals, are cured of their little world not by rejecting what they have, but by having their universe expanded. And it is almost always as a result of falling in love and getting married.

Because we have been commanded to, "Consider the lilies of the field", I will do so, or at least consider how Chesterton sees the lilies of the field, and hopefully this will shed more light on how Chesterton sees the heresy of scientism. First the heretical view, the view of madness. In an essay on Tennyson, Chesterton writes:

...the position of those who regarded the opening of the "Descent of Man" as the opening of one of the seals of the last days, is a great deal sounder than people have generally allowed. It has been constantly supposed that they were angry with Darwinism because it appeared to do something or other to the book of Genesis; but this was a pretext or a fancy. They fundamentally rebelled against Darwinism, not because they had a fear that it would affect Scripture, but because they had a fear, not altogether unreasonable or ill-founded, that it would affect morality. Man had been engaged, through innumerable ages, in a struggle with sin. The evil within him was as strong as he could cope with--it was as powerful as a cannonade and as enchanting as a song.

But in this struggle he had always had nature on his side. He might be polluted and agonized, but the flowers were innocent and the hills were strong. All the armoury of life, the spears of the pinewood and the batteries of the lightening went into battle beside him... Tennyson lived in the hour when, to all mortal appearance, the whole of the physical universe deserted to the devil. The universe, governed by violence and death, left men to fight alone, with a handful of myths and memories. Men had now to wander in polluted fields and lift up their eyes to abominable hills. They had to arm themselves against the cruelty of flowers and the crimes of grass.<sup>8</sup>

This is the white chess-board with black squares. Contrast this with Chesterton's story "A Crazy Tale":

Every inch of the green place was a living thing, a spire of a tongue rooted in the ground, but alive. Away to the skyline I could not see the ground for those fantastic armies. The silence deafened me with the sense of busy eating, working and breeding. I thought of that multitudinous life and my brain reeled.<sup>9</sup>

This is the black chess-board with white squares.

And from the Dedicatory Poem for *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the ultimate fate of the two visions are contrasted:

And the green carnation withered, as in forest fires that pass,  
Roared in the wind of all the world ten million leaves of grass.<sup>10</sup>

Things being alive implies that they will die. Darwin and Huxley and Gould and a legion of other evolutionists cannot get past the death of living things being at the centre of creation, and are quite chivalrous in insisting that God could not be just and kind if he created everything just for death. Yet it is not death but life that is the issue here, and if life is good, then even the temporary existence that a grasshopper has points to a benevolent God who is willing that every manner of creature can enjoy existence. Science is silent on this matter, because it is not a scientific matter. And Chesterton argued against the tendency of those who superstitiously claimed that science has the right to adjudicate between these two alternate world views of life and death. This is the focus of Chesterton's wrath, so to speak: the scientist who has considered the lilies and found them wanting when God has found them good.

I dispute, however, that a narrow and biological understanding of evolution does this, or that evolution is not good science, as some suggest who would throw out the baby with the bath water. I think that by doing so, attacking science in its legitimate place, storming the bounds of science when it stays within its own bounds is a mistake, and can only rebound to the ignominy of the attacker. Chesterton does not attack science by showing that it is unscientific. But he does insist that science must remain scientific, that science as anything other than science is neither science nor real. In Chesterton's words: "Evolution simply means that a positive thing called an ape turned very slowly into a positive thing called a man, then it is stingless for the most orthodox."<sup>11</sup>

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I have discussed the nature of the scientific view of reality and what I think Chesterton was actually arguing against when he criticized science, scientists, Darwin, evolution, and the like. And I have marshaled for evidence his fictional scientists, and how they were characterized by Chesterton. And not just scientists, but his single-minded scholars and academics, and not just these, but all his single-minded characters.

One thing that should be apparent by now, and I do not think this is a simple artifact of Chesterton's period, is that these characters are all men. In fact, the two novels in which two such men play against each other, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, and *The Ball and The Cross*, are largely devoid of any women whatever. Freud would give us reasons why it is men that are so single minded, and not women. And Chesterton would express this same thing differently, defining the roles of men and women as specialists in a democracy and generalists in a dictatorship. And the ecofeminist environmentalist Caroline Merchant would agree with the substance of Chesterton's views on the nature of men and women, claiming as she does, that the age of science is dominated by a masculine blindness to the larger realities that qualify and nuance any endeavor. In fact, Ms. Merchant demands that women be liberated intellectually from the scientism of the past 200 years so they can introduce a feminine or feminist world view of interconnectedness and nurturing.<sup>12</sup> It may come as a surprise to some to find Chesterton's ideas on the leading edge of ecofeminism. Not to Chesterton though, who understood the nature of all revolutions.

Therefore, Chesterton cures many of his fictional scientists, academics, scholars, who are possessed by a single idea, by having them get married.

In *Manalive*, Smith, the madman par excellence, not only gets married, he continues to court his wife with a vigour that Malcolm Muggeridge considered sadistic, demonstrating to me that Muggeridge completely missed Chesterton's point.

In *The Man Who Was Thursday*, it is significant that after the revelation of Sunday to Syme, what he was groping for poetically in his pursuit of order he finally understood, and did what he should have done all along, married the pretty girl he met at the beginning of the story.

What Syme understood by the end of the novel is wrapped up in the mystery of who Sunday is. Chesterton explains: "You ask who Sunday is? Well, you may call him Nature, if you like. But you will note that when the mask of nature is lifted you find God behind. All the wild exuberance of Nature, all its strange pranks, all its seeming indifference to the wants and feelings of men, all that is only a mask. It is a mask which your Lucien Gregory paint, but can never raise."<sup>13</sup> I think there is a bit more, or rather another way of saying what Chesterton has told us so that it gives us a bit more light. Sunday is nature, under the mask of which is God, recalling that on Sunday God rested after creation, and saw that it was good. The Lucien Gregory's of this world, who only see the mask, cannot get to the goodness of things, and, while maintaining their agnosticism or neutrality, effectively argue for the evilness of things.

In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, there are no women, but the resolution that Auberon Quin and Adam Wayne, the satirist and the humorless fanatic, are simply two lobes of a plowman's brain only gets to part of the story. Chesterton further explains for us that: "The Cathedrals, built in the ages that loved God, are full of blasphemous grotesques. The mother laughs continually at the child, the lover laughs

continually at the lover, the wife at the husband, the friend at the friend." <sup>14</sup>

In *The Ball and the Cross* the entire battle between Angus and McIsaac is over a girl, who happens to be Our Lady, the Virgin Mary. And for Chesterton, the image of Mary was always the Mother and Child.

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To re-iterate, it is not the mask of nature that is the problem, or the study of that mask that is the problem, for Chesterton has told us that Lucien can paint the mask. In the same way Darwin can tell us about the finches on the Galapagos, and any modern biologist can tell us about the evolution of various insects and amphibians, or scientist about the natural world. But by claiming to be spiritually agnostic in the matter of the goodness of things, our scientist friends, our artists, or whomever, take a dogmatic position about the non-goodness of things. Either we believe with Chesterton that stuff is good, or we believe with Darwin, Huxley and Gould, that stuff is not good. This belief in the non-goodness of matter has other, older names, Manicheanism, Catharism, Albigensianism. And, as these heresies swept through Europe they attacked both the institution of marriage and the fruitfulness of marriage. And in their modern incarnations of Puritanism, Calvinism, Capitalism, this same heresy continues to attack the institution of marriage, preaching instead the joys of a job, junior kindergarten, and a mall to shop in, and to attack the fruitfulness of marriage with their emphasis on contraception. Wherever the Albigensians hold sway, sterility is embraced.

We are now able to resolve the joke at the end of Chesterton's *The Return of Don Quixote*. Herne, one of the most humourless of Chesterton's characters, sees his defeat of big business, the modern Capitalist incarnation of the Albigensians, in the light of his one and only joke. In this novel, Herne proposes to his future wife, and remembering the Albigensian heresies of old, says to her "I say . . . *iii in matrimonium*." <sup>15</sup> For marriage is a act that publically demonstrates faith in the goodness of fruitful existence. To bring children into the world, runs counter to the whole modern ethic by demonstrating that human life is good. Marriage is the symbol of this assertion for Chesterton. Of course, this faith in the goodness of human life, can be acted on in many ways, Father Brown's celibacy is one way, the refusal to participate in injustice and work towards real justice, as Basil Grant does is another. Fighting for the honour of the Mother and Child, as Evan McIan did, as many soldiers have done, and as many pro-lifers continue to do, is yet another.

While the fictional scientists of Chesterton's novels demonstrate Chesterton's diagnosis and cure of scientism, the Father Brown stories, Chesterton at his best, allow us to see how the short priest deals with the various scientists and megalomaniacs and heretics that cross his path.

Flambeau, while a criminal inhabiting his own narrow world, is warned by Father Brown in *The Flying Stars* that he will descend into the private hell of a dead world: "But someday you will be an old grey monkey, Flambeau. You will sit up in your tree forest cold at heart and close to death, and the tree tops will be very bare." <sup>16</sup>

When we meet the cured Flambeau, after he goes straight, in *The Secret of Father Brown*, he is the father of a large family: "Flambeau had casually and almost abruptly fallen in love with a Spanish lady, married and brought up a large family on a Spanish estate, without displaying any apparent desire to stray again beyond its borders." <sup>17</sup> I do not think the juxtaposition of the two Flambeaus is accidental.

Chesterton is opposing the freedom that comes with the belief that life is good as symbolized by marriage and children, against the creed that good is defined by the individual.

Father Brown can shed more light for us on the nature of the heresy of Capitalism and its relationship to science and Darwinism. In the crime of the communist, Father Brown refers to the dinner-table conversation of several Oxford academics in which they were justifying cheating the poor out of their wages as being good business practice by the standard of the survival of the fittest: "I told you that heresies and false doctrines had become common and conversational; that everybody was used to them; that nobody really noticed them. Did you think I meant Communism when I said that? Why, its just the other way. You were all as nervous as cats about Communism; and you watched Craken like a wolf. Of course, Communism is a heresy; but it isn't a heresy that you people take for granted. It is Capitalism you take for granted; or rather the vices of Capitalism disguised as a dead Darwinism. Do you recall what you were all saying in the Common Room, about life being only a scramble, and nature demanding the survival of the fittest, and how it doesn't matter whether the poor are paid justly or not? Why that is the heresy you have grown accustomed to, my friends; and its every bit as much a heresy as Communism."<sup>18</sup>

Warren Wynde the great philanthropist, judged the three men who in revenge became his killers. Such was the generosity of Fr. Brown that he even extended the hope of mercy to Warren Wynde. Stephen J. Gould tells us about similar philanthropy shown by Charles Darwin. "Darwin wished to be buried in the local churchyard of his adopted village in Downe, where he had done the requisite good deeds for a man of wealth and social standing — including service as a magistrate, proper donations to the poor, and establishment of his own charities, including a recreation hall with books and games for workingmen, but no alcohol."<sup>19</sup> If Father Brown can extend mercy to Warren Wynde, then certainly Darwin has a right to the same, in spite of the implicit judgment of refusing beer to workingmen.

It is the central point of my thesis that it is the private religion of the heretic, that of defining one's own reality, that Chesterton argues against. And as such, it is not just the scientist who is blameworthy, but anyone who would set themselves above their fellow men. The religious minister and the artist can be equally guilty, and equally prone to this error as the scientist is, for it is an old temptation, as old as the days of innocence in the garden, when it first presented itself to our first parents.

So, from the Hammer of God: "He thought it was given to him to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor. But he saw all men walking about like insects. He saw one especially strutting just below him, insolent and evident by a bright green hat — a poisonous insect."<sup>20</sup>

As an entomologist, I take this warning seriously. If there is a danger for the scientist, it is not in science, but in the scientist himself. I manipulate, dissect and pin innumerable flies in the course of my work. The history of evolutionary biology is largely the result of manipulating, dissecting and pinning flies. It is not the flies, or what the flies tell us about evolution and biology where the dangers lay, but in the scientist who becomes used to the manipulation and dissecting, forgetting that he or she is cutting into little pieces a creature that was made by God, and as such, is good. Chesterton's scientists that escape this heresy show us do so through their humility.

John Bulnois, perhaps my favourite scientist in all of Chesterton's fiction, demonstrates this by his amusements. He is a scientist who anticipated the theory of evolution by spurts, known as the theory

of punctuated equilibrium. Bulnois calls it Catastrophism. Bulnois' humanity is evident by his reading mystery stories and smoking cigars. As such, he was without guile. He is not fettered by his science because he is a humble man, and his humility gives him agility in his intellectual environment. Because he does not identify himself with his philosophical idea, the idea does not possess him. He is the very antithesis of Darwin and Huxley, who defended evolution as though their honour was at stake, or that their grasp on the world was. This is just the problem, they had no right to have such a grasp on the world and demand that everyone else's world be destroyed in order that their vision could survive intact.

But this doesn't tell us how to keep our own sanity, or what our attitude should be toward science. We know, of course, that there is nothing that science can discover that can jeopardize our belief in the goodness of things. The fact that chickens and dragonflies practice cannibalism does not chip away at the basic goodness that comes with existence. It is only a superstition that science might someday find something that hurts our faith in the goodness of being.

The scientific accumulation of facts from nature cannot do this by definition, and to be afraid that it might, or to claim that it has, is as superstitious as being afraid of black cats or spilled salt. Salt spilled on the table is as harmless as salt spilled in the lab, and a cat in the road is as benign as a cat in a test tube. Chesterton has told us the problem, diagnosed for us the heresy, has given us examples in his fiction of characters who act out their belief in the fruitfulness and goodness of life, by refusing to participate in the lie of sterility and death. And Chesterton reveals for us the healthy attitude to science, in spite of the scientists who have lost their faith and the faithful who have lost their nerve, and who both hold over our heads the bogeyman of what nature might tell us.

This superstition is to be dealt with as all superstitions are dealt with. It is fitting that the manner of doing so is revealed to us by Father Brown. In the Blast of the Book, he was confronted with a book that had brought death to all who had opened it. The clergyman who brought the book brought the story of fear with it, The scientist to whom the book was brought learned to fear the book from the parson. The scientist was a good man, the parson was a false prophet. And it was Father Brown who broke the spell by opening the book. The text of the evil book spoke very clearly about the threat that scientific research poses to faith. Father Brown addressing the scientist, explains:

"You are a great servant of truth and you know I could never be disrespectful to that. You've seen through a lot of liars, when you put your mind to it. But don't only look at liars. Do, occasionally look at honest men — like the waiter."

"Where is Berridge now?" asked the Professor, after a long silence.

"I haven't the least doubt," said Father Brown, "that he is back in your office. In fact, he came back into your office at the exact moment when the Rev. Luke Pringle read the awful volume and faded into the void."

There was another long silence and then Professor Openshaw laughed; with the laugh of a great man who is great enough to look small. Then he said abruptly:

"I suppose I do deserve it; for not noticing the nearest helpers I have. But you must admit the accumulation of incidents was rather formidable. Did you never feel just a momentary awe of the awful volume?"

"Oh, that," said Father Brown. "I opened it as soon as I saw it lying there. It's all blank

pages. You see, I am not superstitious." <sup>21</sup>

There is still a question of Chesterton's response to the scientist who claims, contrary to the facts of his or her science, that science itself witnesses against the fundamental goodness of created existence. What about the Darwinist who claims that wolves eating rabbits is proof against objective morality, or the Darwinian economist who claims that competition for mates in white tailed deer proves that the family farm should die if it is out competed, or that sharks swallowing small fish demand that small businesses should be swallowed up by larger ones?

The scientific metaphysician, the prophet Zarathustra, from the pen of Friedrich Nietzsche, has announced for us on good authority, weighing all the evidence, measuring all the microns, and counting all the microbes, that God is dead, and more, that man has killed him. In the Insoluble Problem, there is a similar announcement of a murder. Yet in this mystery, the evidence that supposedly points to a murder is spurious — there is no murder. The murder is a fiction to distract Father Brown and Flambeau, so that the great thief, Tiger Tyrone, can rob a monastery of the Relic of St. Dorothy. Tiger Tyrone is aided in this by a fanatical devotee who is, "one of those shoddy scientific rebels who tinker with dud bombs; and idealist run to seed." Our modern Tiger Tyrones are equally insistent upon their staged murder of God, with spurious evidence built on evolving butterflies and snails and worms and weeds, and expanding universes and indeterminate sub-atomic particles and genetic dilemmas, aided by a host of shoddy scientific rebels who are idealists run to seed. Of course, we can try to solve these puzzles and counteract the never-ending series of supposed proofs that point to the death of God. Or we can follow Father Brown's example.

What Father Brown did in the same situation was to go to the monastery and save the relic, leaving the site of the false murder, where the crime was just an illusion. I think that this is what Chesterton did with regards to science as well. He did not refute the factuality of scientific facts, the veracity of scientific theories, he disputed that these things were evidence that God was dead, or had any claim on our belief in the goodness of being, and he concentrated on defending the relic of faith, that being is good, not with malice, but with hope.

For me, and for others I suspect, while it might be easy to follow Father Brown's charity and to focus on the essentials in the abstract, it is hard to be generous toward the those cultural proponents of death that daily try to rob the me of my faith, or shrink my universe, or lead me to despair. That is the point of the poem I quoted at the beginning. And the point is that this is a trap that Chesterton avoided.

To finish, I will give the last words to Chesterton, as he describes for us how Father Brown's kept from being distracted by false claims, spurious mysteries, and stifling atmospheres.

He raised his eyes and saw through the veil of incense smoke and of twinkling lights that Benediction was drawing to its end while the procession waited. The sense of accumulated riches of time and tradition pressed past him like a crowd moving in rank after rank, through unending centuries; and high above them all, like a garland of unfading flames, like the sun of our mortal midnight, the great monsternce blazed against the darkness of the vaulted shadows, as it blazed against the black enigma of the universe. For some are convinced that this enigma also is an Insoluble Problem. And others have equal certitude that it has but one solution. <sup>22</sup>

**Footnotes**

- 1 *The Catholic and Conversion*. CW 3: 81.
- 2 *Orthodoxy*. CW 1: 219-220.
- 3 Quoted in William Irvine's *Angels, Apes, and Victorians*. (New York: Time Inc. Book Division 1963) 395.
- 4 Quoted in *Angels, Apes and Victorians*. 135.
- 5 Stephen J. Gould. *Rock of Ages: Science and religion in the Fullness of Life*. (New York: Ballantine 1999) 207.
- 6 *Autobiography*. CW 16: 38.
- 7 Joseph Addison. "The Spectator No. 565." *Selected Essays of Addison*. (New York: Allyn and Bacon 1944) 220.
- 8 "Tennyson" *A Handful of Authors*. (London: Sheed and Ward. 1953) 98.
- 9 "A Crazy Tale." CW 14: 96.
- 10 *The Man Who Was Thursday*. CW 6: 473.
- 11 The entire quotation reads: "If evolution simply means that a positive thing called an ape turned slowly into a positive thing called a man, then it is stingless for the most orthodox, for a personal God might just as well do things slowly as quickly, especially if, like the Christian God, he were outside time. But if it means anything more, it means that there is no such thing as an ape to change, and no such thing as a man for him to change into. It means that there is no such thing as a thing." *Orthodoxy*. 237 - 238.
- 12 Caroline Merchant, ed. *Ecological Revolutions in major Problems in American Environmental History: Documents and Essays* (Toronto: D. C. Heath and Company, 1993).
- 13 "What does *The Man Who Was Thursday* Mean?" *The Illustrated Sunday herald*. January 24, 1926. (Reprinted in *Midwest Chesterton News*, May 10, 1992).
- 14 *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. CW 6: 379.
- 15 Literally "He has gone into matrimony." A reference to what happened to many of those who returned to the Catholic faith after having been involved in the Albigensian heresy in 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century France.
- 16 "The Flying Stars." *The Penguin Complete Father Brown*. (New York: penguin 1981) 64.
- 17 "The Secret of Father Brown." *Ibid*. 461.
- 18 "The Crime of the Communist." *Ibid*. 672.
- 19 Gould. 53.
- 20 "The Hammer of God." *Complete Father Brown*. 130.
- 21 "The Blast of the Book." *Ibid*. 631.
- 22 "The Insoluble Problem." *Ibid*. 704.