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"PYGMIES AND SLEEPING GIANT": THOMIST PERSONALISM IN THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT OF GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

With the world at political crossroads, and nations striving to define their identity, it is ever important for the West to look in its own past, and drink from the inexhaustible sources of thought that—for reason this or other, by chance, by human effort, by sudden turns of fate—had been opened in its history; and it is ever wise for all who identify themselves with this great tradition to contribute—if only a little, and as much as they can. This paper, within all the bounds of proper proportions, has been written with precisely such a belief—and such an intention.

The purpose of this text is to detect and describe the points of identity between Thomist personalism and the social and political thought of an eminent English writer, thinker and Christian apologist, Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936), proving that his work in these fields can, indeed, be identified as personalist and thus inscribed in the wider context of the great tradition of Christian thought, analyzed from this perspective, and better understood. In order to perform this operation, the text is going to make use of the socio-political texts of Jacques Maritain, *the* personalist philosopher of the 20th century, a selection of the original writings of G.K. Chesterton, and a variety of theoretical studies relevant to the problem, most notably: the "Chestertonological" works of William Oddie and historical books concerning personalism penned by Stanislaw Kowalczyk, Polish historian of philosophy, and one of the most competent authorities in the field.

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The text is going to be organized in a very simple manner. It shall begin with an attempt at explaining (very generally) what is meant under the term of "Thomist personalism"; then, it shall proceed to establishing the most basic framework of this doctrine; next—it shall pass to demonstrating the personalist character of the two elements of Chesterton's thought, namely—his nationalism and distributism; it shall close with several general remarks, aimed at suggesting several potential advantages provided by an analysis of this type.

Let us, then, proceed to the matter; what is—generally speaking—Thomist personalism?

1. PERSONALISM EXPLAINED

So far, Thomist personalism has been the only kind of personalism mentioned in this text; but obviously, if there is a Thomist personalism, there must be also a non-Thomist personalism. There is personalism connected to Thomist philosophy, and personalism not necessarily connected to Thomist philosophy; personalism in general. And, indeed, Stanislaw Kowalczyk explains it quite clearly.

Firstly, then, personalism is a general, so to speak, *philosophical tendency*; a certain general intellectual attitude, unconnected with any specific philosophical postulates, but rather covering certain "essentials," that might find their realization in a multitude of specific systems of thought. Thus Kowalczyk, in his seminal work *The Currents of Personalism, from Augustine to Wojtyla,* writes:

> However, what is personalism? There are many versions of this concept, but its most basic paradigms amount to the following ones: 1) human being is a person and not only matter endowed with thought, a biological creature, domesticated animal, a set (a segment) of material components etc.: 2) he or she is thus an ontological, axiological and social subject—a goal and not a tool, means, thing; 3) the nature of human person includes both the material and the supra-material, that is: psychic and spiritual, components; 4) the basic faculties of the human person are: reason capable of thinking and auto-reflexion and free will, organically connected with the responsibility for one's actions; 5) human being is a creature that is: recognizable, sensitive and capable of creating the supra-material values: truth, moral good, beauty, love, benevolence, solidarity, sanctity and sacrality; 6) human being as a person is a creature social, dialogical and communal.[1]

[1] Stanisław KOWALCZYK, *Nurty personalizmu: od Augustyna do Wojtyły* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2010), 9: "Czym jednak jest personalizm? Istnieje wiele jego ujęć, ale jego podstawowe

Therefore, Kowalczyk identifies as personalists also these systems the authors of which made no reference to the notion of "personalism" as such whatsoever; systems of Christian thought—of course—as those of Augustine or Thomas Aquinas, but also systems of non-Christian provenience, like those of Descartes, Kant and Jaspers.[2]

However, this definition, even though quite extensive, does not exhaust the matter; and in another book, *The Outline of the Philosophy of Man,* Kowalczyk writes in a slightly different manner, which serves as a neat supplementation of the definition provided above. He writes:

> There are many definitions of personalism. Most often every philosophical, religious and social current, which affirms: a. personal being of man, b. material and spiritual dimensions of his nature, c. rationality and sensitivity to higher values, d. primary value of human person to the world of things and economico-social and political structures, is defined as personalism.[3]

Point "d." is of special significance here; especially that Kowalczyk is not alone in his diagnosis. *The Philosophical Dictionary-Guide*, issued by Polish Thomas Aquinas' Association (so by Polish "Lublin School," with which Kowalczyk was himself connected), tells its readers that personalism is not only a certain concept of human nature, but also "cultural and social movement, promoting the programs that support the integral development of the human person, in which values of the economic and technical order are subjected to values of the personal and spiritual order."[4] In *The Currents…*

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paradygmaty sprowadzają się do następujących: 1) człowiek jest osobą, a nie tylko myślącą materią, posiadaczem biologicznego życia, udomowionym zwierzęciem, zespołem (segmentem) materialnych elementów itp.; 2) jest więc podmiotem ontologicznym, aksjologicznym i społecznym—jest celem, a nie narzędziem, środkiem, rzeczą; 3) w swej naturze osoba ludzka zawiera zarówno elementy materialne, jak i ponadmaterialne, tj. psychiczne i duchowe; 4) podstawowymi władzami człowieka jest intelekt zdolny do myślenia i autorefleksji oraz wolna wola organicznie połączona z odpowiedzialnością za własne działania; 5) człowiek jest istotą rozpoznawalną, wrażliwą i współtworzącą wartości ponadmaterialne: prawdę, dobro moralne, piękno, miłość, życzliwość, solidarność, świętość i sakralność; 6) człowiek jako osoba jest istotą społeczną, dialogiczną, wspólnotową." ALL THE TRANSLATIONS FROM POLISH ARE MINE—M.W.

[2] Ibid., table of contents and p. 6.

[3] Stanisław KOWALCZYK, *Zarys filozofii człowieka* (Sandomierz: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne 1990), 305: "Istnieje wiele określeń personalizmu. Najczęściej personalizmem nazywa się każdy nurt filozoficzny, religijny i społeczny, który uznaje: a. osobowy byt człowieka, b. materialny i duchowy wymiar jego natury, c. rozumność i wrażliwość na wyższe wartości, d. nadrzędną wartość osoby ludzkiej wobec świata rzeczy oraz struktur ekonomiczno-społecznych i politycznych."

[4] *Słownik-przewodnik filozoficzny. Osoby – problemy – terminy*, ed. Andrzej Maryniarczyk (Lublin: PTTA, 2012), s.v. "personalizm": "[…] prąd kulturowo-społeczny, promujący programy dzia-

Kowalczyk seems to accept this twofold definition—for all of his analyses end with an analysis of the social implications of every given theory.[5] Therefore it might be said that personalism, properly speaking, is a philosophical doctrine of man considered both in his individual, as well as social being, with the two dimensions strictly interconnected and quite inseparable.

In other words: if man is considered, he (as a social creature) cannot be considered without a reference to social life. Personalism, thus, after defining human nature as such (in accordance with the general principles described above) must necessarily proceed to explain society in relation to this nature as defined in such and such a way, or—simply—demonstrate how and why society emanates from human nature (defined in such or such a way) and is determined by it.

From many forms of personalist thought one is of a special significance; especially that it fulfills all the aforementioned conditions in an extensive and open manner. It is, precisely, Thomist personalism, which finds its high embodiment in the thought of Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), who managed to integrate all the necessary elements of this philosophical doctrine, "anthropological, axiological and socio-economic,"[6] providing what might be called "the personalist synthesis" of Thomist philosophy. It is quite impossible to understand Thomist personalism without understanding Jacques Maritain; but it is possible to understand Thomist personalism—at least in its most essential structure—understanding only Jacques Maritain and no other thinker. And to consideration of this great "exemplar" of Thomist thought, this paper is going to proceed presently.

2. THE MAJESTY AND POVERTY OF HUMAN BEING

The former quote from Kowalczyk furnishes this analysis with quite a neat framework.

Firstly, then, as to the anthropological element.

Maritain's personalist thought rest upon a solid foundation of a unique concept of man, which sprouted in a vital and strict connection with the

łań wspierających integralny rozwój osoby ludzkiej, w których wartości ekonomiczne i techniczne są podporządkowane wartościom osobowo-duchowym." ("personalizm […] a cultural and social trend, promoting the schemes of action that support the integral development of human person, in which the economic and technical values are subjected to the personal and spiritual values.")

[5] KOWALCZYK, *Nurty personalizmu*, 14, 22, 50, 139–141.

[6] Ibid., 125.

Thomist tradition of thought; it is the concept of human existence as "stretched between" the two—to use the terms Maritain himself uses in his little yet seminal book upon the subject, *The Person and the Common Good,* which he wrote while serving as the French ambassador to Vatican in 1946—"metaphysical poles"—to wit: individuality and personality—radically different, in a sense even contradictory, yet united in the unity of every single actually existing man and woman.[7]

How is it possible?

Now, obviously, Thomas Aquinas defines man, as Étienne Gilson formulates it, as a "twofold composition"; composed of two kinds of act and potence: body and soul, which together make man's essence—and this composite essence taken as a whole and yet another factor: existence, the *act par excellence*, which constitutes man not in his nature: but being as such.[8] Of course, this composition is not an accidental composition of two things existing in themselves, but—as Maritain writes—a substantial composition of "two substantial co-principles of the same being, the same reality," which together and inseparably make this reality (both as to nature and as to being) what it is.[9]

Maritain's observations as to individuality and personality are simply logical conclusions drawn from the assertion that the act of existence actualizes a reality that in itself is not manifold, but twofold; now, as act is always proportionate to potency it actualizes,[10] this single human act of existence has to be, in some manner, "proportionate" to these two principles of potency it actualizes, with this manner being of such nature that—as the principles in question do not constitute two separate essences, but one—would not destroy its singularity. In other words: every man exists due to a single act of existence, and he exists *as one*, but he *exercises* (fulfills, realizes, "completes"—especially in the realm of action) his existence in two modes, connected with two principles—matter and spirit—that govern the two "co-principles" of his essence. "If our description is adequate, such are the two metaphysical aspects of the human being, individuality and personality, together with their proper ontological features,"[11] says Maritain.

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[7] Jacques MARITAIN, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 33.

[8] Étienne GILSON, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 376.

[9] MARITAIN, *The Person and the Common Good*, 36.

[10] GILSON, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 369.

[11] MARITAIN, *The Person and the Common Good*, 43.

What are these features? Well, they are—in a sense—what their principles are. Matter is in itself "a kind of non-being, a mere potency or ability to receive forms and undergo substantial mutations"[12]; therefore, it begets a mode of being similar to itself and in consequence "in each of us, individuality, being that which excludes from oneself all that other men are, could be described as the narrowness of the ego, forever threatened and forever eager *to grasp for itself*. Such narrowness in flesh animated by a spirit derives from matter."[13] It is a mode of being marked by lack, imperfection and constant desire for self-preservation. Spirit, on the other hand, is the "the threshold of independence properly so called, and of interiority to oneself," something radically different, so also the mode of being it generates is radically different than the one proceeding from matter;

> personality is the subsistence of the spiritual soul communicated to the human composite. Because, in our substance, it is an imprint or seal which enables it to possess its existence, to perfect and give itself freely, personality testifies to the generosity or expansiveness in being which an incarnate spirit derives from its spiritual nature and which constitutes, within the secret depths of our ontological structure, a source of dynamic unity, of unification from within.[14]

It is a mode of being intrinsically "generous," "open"—so to speak—governed in action not by the desire for self-preservation, but by principle of spiritual "superexistence of knowledge and love."[15] It is, as Maritain himself phrases it, "a metaphysical seal," that elevates human nature to a higher level; "liberates" it, as if, from the world of matter; and, indeed, allows it to transcend the whole material cosmos, and look it in the face, as (in a sense) equal to equal.[16]

Obviously, it does not mean that individuality is something in itself evil—far from it![17] It is just the manner in which human beings exist—and necessarily so.

Now, it is hard to overestimate the bearing of such a constatation upon the philosophy of human affairs; Maritain speaks of education.[18] It is a most fortunate clue. For education as such is a social matter; and indeed, it is precisely society that interests us in this short paper. In accordance with

[12] Ibid., 35.
[13] Ibid., 37.
[14] Ibid., 41.
[15] Ibid., 40.
[16] Ibid., 41.
[17] Ibid., 43.
[18] Ibid., 45.

Kowalczyk's observation, it interests us in relation to two problems: itself, and the hierarchy of values that governs it. And to narrow the matter even further: as to its nature; and action (so the notion of common good, which is the metaphysical principle of social action). With these to problems forming, as a fact (and as it shall become obvious in a moment), just to sides of the same questions.

So as to the nature of society.

In the light of the previous ascertainments, it is rather a simple matter, and does not require—perhaps—that long of an elucidation. Suffice to say that just as its source, social life has—so to say—two dimensions: material and spiritual. In the most important of his political works, *Man and the State* (1951), Maritain describes this difference by distinguishing two types of communal life: society and community.

> Community is a product of instinct and heredity in given circumstances and historical frameworks; the *society* a product of reason and moral strength (what the Ancients called "virtue"). In the *community,* social relations proceed from given historical situations and […] man appears to be a product of the social group. In *society,* personal consciousness takes priority, the social group is shaped by men, and social relations proceed from a given initiative, a given idea, and a voluntary determination of human persons.[19]

"Determination of human persons"; even vocabulary here testifies to the fact.

For it is indeed difficult not to notice that this differentiation between two "modes" or "dimensions" of social life is indeed just a social "translation" of the differentiation between two modes of being described above; and that "community" (in this case) is simply social life as produced by *individuality* and "society"—by *personality*. Indeed, such an observation has already been made, and even though the work in which it was made has never been published, it serves the purpose of this text quite well. And so it can be said that *community* is a product of "the survival instinct, pertaining to the sphere of biological," proper to the material mode of existence, with its "narrowness" and (selfish, to speak bluntly) desire of self preservation, with *society* serving as a union of persons, "no longer a work of instinct, but of the free cooperation governed by the good that the persons hold in common."[20]

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[19] Jacques MARITAIN, *Man and the State* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 3–4.

[20] Maciej WĄS, "'Our Little Lives': Gilbert Keith Chesterton as a Precursor of the 20th Century Christian Personalism" (Master's Thesis, University of Silesia, 2016), 22–23.

Of course, just as in the case of the relation of individuality and personality in human being as such, these two forms of communal life do not exist separately, but constantly interact and overlap; man is at the same time a member of society, and of community, in fact—a number of communities (the family, say, the tribe, the nation)[21]; and this assertion itself introduces the question of *order* or *hierarchy* of the communal life. For if these two principles coexist, and remain in the constant, mutual relation with each other—what should this relation be? How to ensure that the realities in question will not enter into conflict, but remain in harmony? Which one of the two should take precedence?

In order to explain this, it is necessary to move to the sphere of the axiological; and present—very briefly—unique Maritainian concept (as Maritainian concepts usually are) of common good.

Jacek Grzybowski, another eminent Polish scholar of Thomist thought, in his book *Jacques Maritain and the New Christendom* (2007), stresses the central position the notion of common good plays in Maritain's social philosophy, and distinguishes in it two different aspects: material and spiritual.[22] Again, thus, vocabulary alone contributes to the question. These two aspects could be described as follows; spiritual aspect is "the good of the person taken as such," material—"everything in the social context that plays, in relation to this good, a preparatory role."[23] Society exists for the sake of the proper good of human person; it cannot provide this good; but it can operate in such a way as to create for human person such conditions of life, so he or she will be able to attain it on his or her own.

What is this good? In the case of temporal order, it is not the beatific vision, the ultimate goal of man[24]; it is only a "full" (and strictly natural) "blossom of the person,"[25] as Maritain himself wrote in his book concerning philosophy of history (written in cooperation with Joseph W. Evans, 1957), "the manifestation of all the potentialities of human being"[26]; with this manifestations consisting predominantly, as the French philosopher (a prolific and brilliant writer) indicated in yet another book, "the freedom of

[21] MARITAIN, *Man and the State*, 3–7.

[22] Jacek GRZYBOWSKI, *Jacques Maritain i nowa cywilizacja chrześcijańska* (Warszawa: Fronda, 2007), 159-160, 166.

[23] WĄS, "'Our Litte Lives'," 23.

[24] MARITAIN, *The Person and the Common Good*, 15–16.

[25] WĄS, "'Our Litte Lives'," 23.

[26] Jacques MARITAIN and Joseph W. EVANS, *On the Philosophy of History* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1957), 126.

spontaneity" or, in other words, fullness of the "operations of intelligence and love."[27]

Or, in still other words, human happiness properly considered; as much as this happiness can be attained in its purely natural dimension.[28]

And how can "the State" (to use this Maritainian expression) contribute to such a goal?

Obviously, not directly; there is, properly speaking, nothing that the State can do in order to help its inhabitants in achieving something so profound; intellection and love are "immanent acts" and cannot, if it be formulated in a strict manner, be influenced from the outside.[29] But what the State *can* do, is to create certain *conditions* that would make this purely personal effort possible and more fruitful. And how can the State do that? Well, by exercising its normal and proper functions, by the means of "political gain, material welfare, institutional efficiency of the state, of economy."[30] The role of the state is thus to secure its inhabitants *as to their individuality*, to create an environment of "security and sufficiency" (to use this English phrase); to guarantee its people peace in life and material means of livelihood, so they could develop their personal life as persons do—on their own; in the domain of spirit, unreachable for any material institutions of men.

Now, it is not important here *how,* in Maritain's views, the state could do that; it is yet another topic, for another time. What counts is that the State *should* do it, and should do it with respect for the proper metaphysical hierarchy; that the State should understand its natural limitations. And here too, it might be reckoned, we can quote these telling words from *The Person and the Common Good*, that should shine as a beacon (and stand as a warning) to all who deal with the matters of human existence:

> Our instruments are simply the aids; our art is but the servant and cooperator of this interior principle. The whole function of this art is to prune and to trim—operations in which both the individual and the person are interested—in such wise that, within the intimacy of the human being, the gravity of individuality diminishes and that of true personality and its generosity increases. Such an art, to be sure, is difficult.[31]

And with this, this general sketch of Thomist personalism might end.

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[27] Jacques MARITAIN, *Scholasticism and Politics*, trans. Mortimer J. Adler (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2011), 131–133.

[28] Jacques MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1964), 76–77.

[29] Jacques MARITAIN, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Heavens and London: Yale University Press, 1960), 30–31.

[30] GRZYBOWSKI, *Jacques Maritain i nowa cywilizacja chrześcijańska*, 165.

[31] MARITAIN, *The Person and the Common Good*, 46.

Maritain's works are the works of a genius mind; but no genius mind works in isolation. And indeed, the great Jacques did not work in isolation; he was a gigantic figure—but he stood on the backs of other giants; giants of the long, unbroken chain of Christian social thought and tradition that developed throughout the long centuries of Christendom. And he had (though he perhaps did not know of it himself) at least one, equally gigantic companion, a loyal ally, an intellectual friend, who strived to serve the same tradition, and fought for the sake of the same cause.

And his name was Gilbert Keith Chesterton.

3. THE FORGOTTEN UNFORGETTABLE

"His fascination for me was (and still is) not in his paradoxes, not in his sometimes bumptious joie de vivre, not in his commitment to Distributist Politics […] but in his mystical insights about being, reality, life—whatever you want to call it"[32]; thus in the year 2005 wrote Andrew Greely, introducing the readers to the new edition of Masie Ward's *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, perhaps the most known biography of this writer ever written.

Such a view, indeed, is not a very new one. 56 years earlier, a Canadian professor of literature, Hugh Kenner, in his—in very many respect quite admirable—work *Paradox in Chesterton*, stated:

> It is time to abandon the literary and journalistic Chesterton to such a critical fate as might await him from future appraises. And it is also time to see him freed from the accidental accretions of ephemeral literary mannerisms. That means to see him as a master of analogical perception and argument who never failed to focus a high degree of moral wisdom on the most confused issues of the age.[33]

A truly Chestertonian strategy; because a tad paradoxical one. Sacrifice to save, forget to remember. And so, indeed, the Chestertonians had forgotten; for a very, very long time. "I suspect," Mr Russel Sparks comes to the rescue of this hopeless generalization, "if you had asked the man himself what part of the work he was most proud of, he would have said something that is almost totally forgotten: his advocacy of an economic and political philosophy called Distributism."[34]

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[32] Andrew GREELY, "Introduction to New Edition," in Masie WARD, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), xii.

[33] Hugh KENNER, *Paradox in Chesterton* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1947), xxii.

[34] Russell SPARKS, "Chesterton as Economist," in *The Hound of Distributism*, ed. Richard Aleman (Charlotte: ACS Books, 2015), 37.

Now, however, the case of distrubutism is not so tragic; after all, the word is still sometimes in use, as the quote from Greely clearly demonstrates. But if it was possible to organize a little survey, and to ask several "political Chestertonians" what word was, in their opinion, *missing* from the critical commentaries cited above, it might be risked to suggest that they would choose—at least by a great majority—one and the same term; quite popular in general use; not su much in Chestertonian use.

And this word would be: *"democracy."*

Now, obviously, Chesterton was not professionally an academic teacher (though he had encountered this opportunity in his life, he chose not to follow it), nor a writer, nor a philosopher; he was—as he himself states in his *Autobiography*—a journalist.[35] But it is definitely not enough to end the description here. "A journalist" is a very general term; it might signify many different things, sometimes more, sometimes less trifle; sometimes more and sometimes less dignified. So Chesterton was not just "*a* journalist," but concretely—a political journalist. And he—pardon the colloquialism—"loved this job" with all of his heart and with flaming passion. "[F]rom the beginning of his career as a journalist, he profoundly believed he had vocation to confront the notion that truth was the province only of an elite," writes William Oddie; "His belief in democracy was nearer to being a religious conviction than it was to being a merely political stance."[36]

These words, strong and decided say all there is to say about the subject; and also something more. For they are a living example of the fact that the story of the regrettable omission suggested above is slowly coming to a rather happy ending.

And yet, they communicate something different still. It is not obvious—at least not today—whether a political journalist should receive (in one way or other) political education; however, in the case of somebody with such strong a conviction, it seems rather obvious that he did. It is, to say the least, rather improbable that Chesterton could develop such a strong stance without some proper preparations.

As a fact, he made those preparations; there is a very good deal of evidence that his political interest reach as far in his youth as when he was sixteen years old; there are political poems he wrote about the French Revolution,[37] Jacobite

[35] Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, *Autobiography* (Kelly Bray: House of Stratus, 2001), 30.

[36] William ODDIE, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 191.

[37] Ibid., 77–78.

rebellions,[38] fragments of his diaries signifying strong hostility towards the monarchy of the Russian Tsars, and towards Russian anti-semitism, increasing rapidly about that time.[39] Now, what interests us here, however, are not these fact as such (interesting as they are), but rather this what they point towards; to wit: that Chesterton was, simply speaking, extremely well-read as to political matters; thus being (and therein comes the crux of the thing)—*indirectly*—a political thinker.

Indeed, almost anything Chesterton wrote was political; he would include political elucidations anywhere he could; he would include them in his apologetics (as the famous Trinitarian argument from *Orthodoxy* clearly demonstrates[40]); he would include them in his literary studies, beginning the study of Victorian literature by some rapid (yet so excellent) remarks about political philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau[41]; he would include them in his travel-writing. And indeed, it is difficult to understand why, for example, his beautiful passage about human equality from *What I Saw in America* has attracted, so far, so little attention.[42]

Now, *What I Saw in America* is a very good reference; as it contains this one beautiful passage, that—incidentally—only too well matches the problem in question. In this book, while describing political problems of America he noted at the time, concludes the whole chapter by saying:

> Hints of it may be noted here and there like muffled gongs of doom. The other day some people preaching some low trick or other, for running away from the glory of motherhood, were suddenly silenced in New York; by a voice of deep and democratic volume. The prigs who potter about the great plains are pygmies dancing round a sleeping giant. That which sleeps, so far as they are concerned, is the huge power of human unanimity and intolerance in the soul of America. At present the masses in the Middle West are indifferent to such fancies or faintly attracted by them, as fashions of culture from the great cities. But any day it may not be so; some lunatic may cut across their economic rights or their strange and buried religion; and then he will see something. He will find himself running like a nigger who has wronged a white woman or a man who has set the prairie on fire. He will see something which the politicians fan in its sleep and flatter with the name of the people, which many reactionaries have cursed with the name of the

[38] Ibid., 79.

[39] Ibid., 80.

[40] Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, *Orthodoxy* (United States: Popular Classics Publishing, 2012), 85.

[41] Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), 22–23.

[42] Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, *What I Saw in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1922), 17–18.

> mob, but which in any case has had under its feet the crowns of many kings. It was said that the voice of the people is the voice of God; and this at least is certain, that it can be the voice of God to the wicked. And the last antics of their arrogance shall stiffen before something enormous, such as towers in the last words that Job heard out of the whirlwind; and a voice they never knew shall tell them that his name is Leviathan, and he is lord over all the children of pride. [43]

If this passage is not a description, a highly complex and symbolic description, of the Rousseau's concept of the general will, it is nothing. However,—it evidently is not nothing; so it has to be what it is. Julia Stapleton, one of the few scholars who noticed the political potential of Chesterton's thought, noticed this Rousseauistic element of it as well[44]; however, her work—though admirable and pioneering—is not enough. For in this case, nothing is enough. And all who neglect the thought of Gilbert Keith Chesterton, all who patronize it, all who laugh about it and make it look childish, are like pygmies dancing around a sleeping giant; and all the better for it. As perhaps thanks to them, this giant will—someday—wake up.

4. NATIONS AND MEN

Having said all this, we might now proceed to the next step of the analysis. It was indicated that this paper is going to be concerned with Chesterton's nationalism and distributism. There is no need to change that sequence; let us, then, maintain it, and organize the text accordingly.

Firstly, to anticipate an accusation.

Nationalism is not the most popular word of our day; however, words can be used in many different manners. And in this text, one striving to be so academic, it is used in a way neutral and devoid of any temporary political agenda; as to treat nationalism—to quote the famous phrase of Peter Alter—"a value-free, analytical category."[45] Nationalism, to follow Alter's thought a bit further, is "an ideology and political movement which holds the nation and the sovereign nation-state to be crucial indwelling values" of political life.[46] Nothing more—nothing less. Nationalism may—in the concrete of

[43] Ibid., 174–175.

[44] Julia STAPLETON, *Christianity, Patriotism, and Nationhood* (Laham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2009), 118.

[45] Peter ALTER, *Nationalism*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (London, New York, Melbourne, Auckland: Edward Arnold, 1992), 28.

[46] Ibid., 8.

existence—be a positive phenomenon; it may be a negative phenomenon. There are different kinds of nationalisms—just as there are different kinds of nationalists, and—ultimately—different kinds of people; but fundamentally speaking, it is just a kind of political doctrine, like liberalism, conservatism, monarchism, or republicanism, and there is absolutely no need (besides, perhaps, the hidden needs of propaganda) to think otherwise.

With all this said and cleared, the only thing that remains is to assert one and for all that if nationalism be defined in such a way, than yes, Gilbert Keith Chesterton was, despite all the scruples of certain scholars,[47] a nationalist. In order to establish that, it suffices to examine one telling passage from already cited *What I Saw in America*, one of Chesterton's most fundamental and mature political works.

> The English are patriotic; but patriotism is the unconscious form of nationalism. It is being national without understanding the meaning of a nation. The Americans are on the whole too self-conscious, kept moving too much in the pace of public life, with all its temptations to superficiality and fashion; too much aware of outside opinion and with too much appetite for outside criticism. But the English are much too unconscious; and would be the better for an increase in many forms of consciousness, including consciousness of sin. But even their sin is ignorance of their real virtue. The most admirable English things are not the things that are most admired by the English, or for which the English admire themselves. They are things now blindly neglected and in daily danger of being destroyed. It is all the worse that they should be destroyed, because there is really nothing like them in the world. That is why I have suggested a note of nationalism rather than patriotism for the English; the power of seeing their nation as a nation and not as the nature of things. We say of some ballad from the Balkans or some peasant costume in the Netherlands that it is unique; but the good things of England really are unique. Our very isolation from continental wars and revolutionary reconstructions have kept them unique. The particular kind of beauty there is in an English village, the particular kind of humour there is in an English public-house, are things that cannot be found in lands where the village is far more simply and equally governed, or where the vine is far more honourably served and praised. Yet we shall not save them by merely sinking into them with the conservative sort of contentment, even if the commercial rapacity of our plutocratic reforms would allow us to do so. We must in a sense get far away from England in order to behold her; we must rise above patriotism in order to be practically patriotic; we must have some sense of more varied and remote things before these vanishing virtues can be seen suddenly for what they are; almost as one might fancy that a man would have to rise to the dizziest heights of the divine understanding

[47] STAPLETON, *Christianity, Patriotism, and Nationhood*, 217.

> before he saw, as from a peak far above a whirlpool, how precious is his perishing soul.[48]

It is a lengthy passage, and quite a communicative one, which does not—therefore—require too much of a commentary; nationalism is seen as an attitude more positive even than patriotism. Now, every serious Chestertonian scholar admits that Chesterton was "passionately patriotic"[49]; and if an ardent patriot declares that patriotism is merely "an unconscious form of nationalism," it is impossible not to call him a nationalist.

Now, Chesterton's nationalism—by accident or not—corresponds exactly to what has been called here the personalist concept of social life. Obviously, it is impossible to trace in Chesterton's writing any direct and simple reference to the philosophical concept of individuality and personality as such; however, there are two things that can justify this line of reflexion. Firstly, then, Chesterton was a Thomist.[50] He most certainly read *Summa Theologica*[51]; and he most certainly accepted, though in a very general and, so to speak, "pre-academic" manner, the doctrine of human being as a composite of body and soul.[52] Secondly, there operates, in the realm of ideas and not only, the principle of sufficient reason; and if Chesterton indeed constructed his notion of nation on a personalist basis (as he did, what shall become visible in a moment), it can be asserted, as well, that he grasped and accepted the idea that serves as its sufficient reason—to wit: the differentiation of individuality and personality—though, as it has just been indicated, in a masked (virtual) and pre-academic manner.

What is, then, for Chesterton, a nation?

Nation, for Chesterton, has basically two dimensions, which he renders in his own, most individual style To establish their nature, it is necessary to examine two quotes, fundamental for the proper understanding of the question. Firstly, then, the quote from *The New Jerusalem,* in which nation finds its most characteristic definition:

> It is the vice of any patriotism or religion depending on race that the individual is himself the thing to be worshipped; the individual is his own ideal, and even his own idol. This fancy was fatal to the Germans; it is fatal to the Anglo-Saxons, whenever any of them forswear the glorious name of Englishmen and Americans

[48] CHESTERTON, *What I Saw in America*, 282–283.
[49] ODDIE, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy*, 212.
[50] KENNER, *Paradox in Chesterton*, 5–6.
[51] ODDIE, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy*, 342.
[52] WĄS, "'Our Little Lives'," 46–48.

> to fall into that forlorn description. This is not so when the nation is felt as a noble abstraction, of which the individual is proud in the abstract. A Frenchman is proud of France, and therefore may think himself unworthy of France. But a German is proud of being a German; and he cannot be too unworthy to be a German when he is a German. In short, mere family pride flatters every member of the family; it produced the arrogance of the Germans, and it is capable of producing a much subtler kind of arrogance in the Jews. From this particular sort of self-deception the more savage man of the desert is free. If he is not considering somebody as a Moslem, he will consider him as a man. At the price of something like barbarism, he has at least been saved from ethnology.[53]

Nation, therefore, is a "noble abstraction"; so far so good. But what does this phrase ultimately mean? Well, abstraction is, according to the *Philosophical Dictionary-Guide* already cited here, "a specific action of the intellect, consisting in separating and keeping a certain quality of a thing, on the basis of which intellect forms its cognitive image vel notion (an abstract)."[54] This action, intellectual action, does not pertain to the domain of senses, so—to the domain of the body.[55] It is a Thomist definition; but as Chesterton was a Thomist, he was definitely aware of the role the word "abstraction" plays in this philosophy. Therefore, the conclusion is only too obvious; and all that Chesterton seems to have wanted to say in this passage, can be reduced to one single thing: nation is not a work of the material dimension of man. It is the work of spirit.

Spirit, or—perhaps—"reason and moral strength (what the Ancients called 'virtue')"? This Maritainian interpretation of the passage finds additional evidence in a passage from *The Crimes of England* (1915), in which Chesterton describes the nature of the French nation by saying that "Frenchman is the artist, always painting and repainting France like a house."[56] This metaphor, so characteristically Chestertonian, signifies nothing else than moral effort and conscious action; precisely the same thing that Maritain renders by the term of "moral strength." Nation, therefore, is indeed a fruit of spirit, not matter; a result and creation of the faculties of the soul, not the body, with all its instincts and the delicate yet limited universe of blood and organs.

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[53] Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, *The New Jerusalem* (United States: Watchmaker Publishing, 2010), 24.

[54] *Słownik-przewodnik filozoficzny*, s.v. "abstrakcja": "specyficzna czynność intelektu, polegająca na oddzielaniu i zatrzymywaniu jakiejś właściwości z rzeczy, na podstawie której intelekt formuje jej poznawczy obraz, czyli pojęcie (abstrakt)."

[55] GILSON, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 378.

[56] Gilbert Keith, CHESTERTON, *The Crimes of England* (Teddington: The Echo Library, 2006), 42.

Not material? The case is not as simple as that. It is to be noted that when Chesterton wrote about nations and national matters, especially his own nation and her own matters, he frequently referred precisely to material things. Some of these we already saw; English pubs. However, it is a much larger motive, and accompanies Chesterton's political thought from the very beginning. Thus, for example, in his very early essay, "The Patriotic Idea" (1904), Chesterton, while condemning the overly abstract (sic!) character of imperialism, writes that

> [T]he perfectly legitimate sentiment which leads a man to support, on political grounds, a huge cosmopolitan confederation has about as much resemblance to the passion which has made men sing and die for a strip of land as an admiration for the architecture of Normandy has to the hunger in the heart of Romeo.[57]

And next, slightly further:

> Tolstoyanism, then, with all its earnestness, with all its honourable lucidity, we find, from our point of view, to ba a frigid and arbitrary fancy, incomparable in its moral value to that intensity which has bound living men to an actual and ancient soil.[58]

And here we behold, precisely, the crux of the question; "the soil." Obviously, it is not only the soil as such; it is a metonymy, serving to represent the totality of the material character of a given country. And indeed, Chesterton would frequently return to this question, and include it in his political analyses. He did it, for instance, in his excellent literary biography of William Cobbett (1763-1835), an English radical journalist and politician, with the whole book being one of Chesterton's most magnificent political manifestos. In it, he remarks:

> He [Cobbett] had a great power of sketching a landscape in simple words; and somehow such a twilight of grey and silver remains long in the reader's memory. At the end of a small yard he saw a girl with dark hair scouring out some pots and pans. He looked at her again and saw she was very beautiful. Then he said with a sort of fatal finality: 'That's the girl for me.' And indeed she was the wife who was with him when he died fifty years afterwards, on those Surrey hills that were his home.[59]

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[57] Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, "The Patriotic Idea," in *England: A Nation Being the Papers of the Patriots' Club*, ed. Lucian Oldershaw (London and Edinburgh: R. Brimley Johnson, 1904), 14–15.

[58] Ibid., 18.

[59] Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, *William Cobbett* (Norfolk, VA: IHS Press, 2011), 18.

It is a subtle passage; it does not have a *direct* relationship to the problem. Yet it is also definitely the same *theme*, consisting in a sort of sensual fascination with one's native land; which clearly demonstrates that Chesterton acknowledged one crucial fact; that nations proceed not only from spirit—but also from matter; not only soul, but also—body.

Of course, it is possible to raise at least one objection, and say that the passages cited above still deal with love; and love is—according to Thomist philosophy—a spiritual phenomenon. It might, in this case at least, be *grounded* in the senses; but it does not mean that it is strictly sensual; therefore, a conclusion that Chesterton recognizes the role of individuality in the genesis of social life is stretched.

It is a reasonable objection; however, there is an answer to it. Individuality, as we have seen, is the mode of being begotten by matter, and therefore marked by all the essential traits of material natures; most strongly—perishability, and the consequent desire for self-preservation. Now, could there be any more basic bodily need than hunger? Is anything more "individual," so to speak, in the human being than the desire to eat and sustain its material functions? Love of the native land, which Chesterton talks about, is by no means of a purely aesthetic nature. It is very practical; and its "practicality" can be seen in the same *William Cobbett* quoted above. To wit, Chesterton writes in this book that for Cobbett

> even more than for Nelson, and in another sense, there was something united and almost interchangeable in the three terms of England, home, and beauty. But his was no mere landscape-painter's but a land-owner's and a land-worker's love; and he pored more and more intently over the practice and detail of the farming he had known in boyhood.[60]

It is a direct reference, thus, to agriculture. And is there, ultimately, any other purpose of agriculture, than producing food—and sustaining man's bodily life? Indeed, the theme is by no means accidental; and in "The Patriotic Idea," Chesterton—the young Chesterton—asserts precisely the same thing; directly connecting the love of the Motherland with the necessity for the English nation to "colonize" their country once more—which means nothing else than reestablishing in the English land its agricultural communities.[61] People love their native land not only because it is beautiful; because it is the beauty that formed them and gave them a frame

[60] Ibid., 29.

[61] CHESTERTON, "The Patriotic Idea," 41.

of reference for the rest of their lives. But also, because this land *feeds*; because it allows different people to survive and develop. Because, in other words, it secures them in their individual being.

And nation is, simply, so to speak a community of this peculiar, "economic" love of land. Not solely, of course; it is this community on the one hand—on the other, it is—as we have said—a fruit of the spiritual acts of the soul, of conscious cooperation and intellectual agreement. However, these two perspectives are not contradictory, not separate, but form a one coherent whole, covering different aspects of the being in question. There is—in national life—the material dimension, and the spiritual dimension, and these two dimensions of one reality cannot be properly understood without one another.

It seems obvious, therefore, that Chesterton operates precisely withing the same general framework, the framework of the most basic "intellectual essentials," that animated and stabilized the personalist reflexions of Jacques Maritain. Of course, it is not the question of the *identity* of thought or vocabulary. Chesterton, in his journalistic register of discourse, does not distinguish between "society" and "community," does not explain their nature—he even does not explain precisely *how* these two "poles" of national being are related and function. But he clearly asserts that national being *has* these two poles; that both are necessary; and, thus, seems to suggest that maintaining national health depends of keeping in this matter a proper equilibrium.

What is the nature of this equilibrium? As it might be suspected, it corresponds—in the same, very general yet very real manner—to the Maritainian notion of common good. In order to examine the problem properly however, it is necessary to move to yet another field of interest; and consider Chesterton's economic philosophy, know under the name of distributism. Which this paper is going to do presently.

5. FOR ALL THE HOUSE IS A STAGE

To begin with, let us define the notion. What is, then, distributism?

According to the definition provided by William E. Fahey in his popularizing text about the subject (borrowed from a little book written by Hilaire Belloc (1870–1953), a prolific distributist writer and Chesterton's friend, entitled *Economics for Helen*), distrubitism is "a state of society in

which families composing it are, in a determining number, owners of the land and the means of production as well as themselves the agents of production (that is, people who by their human energy produce wealth with the means of production)."[62] Or, in another sense, it is the *political idea and movement,* aimed at creating or maintaining this precise state of society.

Now, practically speaking, it is very simple; such a state of society is simply a state in which the majority of a given country's economy rests in the hands of private owners, and is divided into portions that enable a personal control over one's wealth—and personal responsibility for its usage.

Was Chesterton a distributist? Emphatically yes; it has already been confirmed by the quote from the text of Russell Sparks, and does not need more evidence. Also, we do not need to present the matter more thoroughly, nor explain it in greater detail. It is not important for this text to analyze *how* Chesterton proposed to maintain (or, as a fact, establish[63]) the distributist system in England of the early 20th century; what *is* important here, however, is understanding *why* he desired to do it. Through this analysis it shall be possible for us to comprehend his vision of the "social equilibrium," mentioned in the previous section.

There can be many answers to that; but, for the purpose of succinctness, here only two shall be mentioned (and obviously, very briefly). Firstly, then, Chesterton's motivations were of economic, or—as it would probably be said today—"social" character; what he strived for was to guarantee people material stability.

According to Hilaire Belloc's masterpiece, *The Servile State* (1912), the book absolutely fundamental for distributist movement,[64] the general goal of any distributist reform would be to "provide" people "*sufficiency* and *security*" in the social system.[65] One of the most striking expressions of that to be fund in Chesterton's own works comes from his set of travel essays entitled *Irish Impressions,* and published in 1919; in this book, Chesterton writes:

> I was moving in a hired motor down a road in the North-West, towards the middle of that rainy autumn. I was not moving very fast; because the progress was slowed down to a solemn procession by crowds of families with their cattle and live stock going to the market beyond; which things also are an allegory. But what struck my mind and stuck in it was this: that all down one side of the road, as far as we went,

[62] William E. FAHEY, "Towards a Description of Distributism," in *The Hound of Distributism*, 13.
[63] SPARKS, *Chesterton as Economist*, 37.
[64] Ibid., 37.
[65] Hilaire BELLOC, *The Servile State* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1977), 41.

> the harvest was gathered in neatly and safely; and all down the other side of the road it was rotting in the rain. Now the side where it was safe was a string of small plots worked by peasant proprietors, as petty by our standards as a row of the cheapest villas. The land on which all the harvest was wasted was the land of a large modern estate. I asked why the landlord was later with his harvesting than the peasants; and I was told rather vaguely that there had been strikes and similar labour troubles. I did not go into the rights of the matter; but the point here is that, whatever they were, the moral is the same. You may curse the cruel Capitalist landlord or you may rave at the ruffianly Bolshevist strikers; but you must admit that between them they had produced a stoppage, which the peasant proprietorship a few yards off did not produce. […] Europe may seem to be rent from end to end by the blast of a Bolshevist trumpet, sundering the bourgeois from the proletarian; but the peasant across the road is neither a bourgeois nor a proletarian. England may seem to be rent by an irreconcilable rivalry between Capital and Labour; but the peasant across the road is both a capitalist and a labourer. He is several other curious things; including the man who got his crops in first; who was literally first in the field. On the left side of the road the big machine had stopped working, *because* it was a big machine. The small men were still working, because they were not machines. Such were the strange relations of the two things, that the stars in their courses fought against Capitalism; that the very clouds rolling over that rocky valley warred for its pigmies against its giants. The rain falls alike on the just and the unjust; yet here it had not fallen alike on the rich and poor, It had fallen to the destruction of the rich.[66]

Now, this rather lengthy passage tells everything there is to tell upon the problem; "healthy division of property" (to use another of Belloc's expressions), such as the one present in an Irish village, with the totality of the land divided among private farmers, each of whom is privately responsible for the usage of his own property, *in the longer perspective* is more economically more efficient, more stable, guarantees security against crises and social turmoil, ensures both rapidity and stable continuity of production. Distributist system, being a flat contradiction of capitalism and socialism alike[67] (with both of these doctrines being the ideologies of "the big machine") did not—at least not in its own principles—grow out of mere sentiments for the romanticised past or the rural *Merry England* from before the Industrial Revolution; it grew out of serious economic considerations about the nature of social economy, and the desire to—*materially*—secure the lives of English people.

[66] Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, *Irish Impressions* (Alcaster: Read Books, 2012), 21–22.

[67] Dale AHLQUIST, "What's Wrong with the World (And How to Fix It), in *The Hound of Distributism*, 2.

To provide some additional backing for this judgement it might be said that the choice of the concrete example which Chesterton explained his thesis on in this passage, is not at all accidental; for the "restoration of agriculture" was—as it has already been suggested in connection with the idea of "colonizing" England—one of his major *idées fixes*. Now, Chesterton lived and worked in a period marked, as a Polish historian of England, Henryk Zinst, attest to it, by the effects of the severe agrarian crisis from the end of the 19th century that basically ruined English agricultural production (while the industrial production was gradually increasing), because of the imported foreign grain, both better in quality and cheaper in price, which covered the major part of English market at the time and gradually pushed the domestic produce almost completely out of commercial circulation.[68] Now, Chesterton saw this state of things as a complete disaster; and thus, in his fundamental distributist work, *The Outline of Sanity* (1925) he passionately urged for immediate "agricultural reconstruction"[69] of his country.

But, then, again we might ask—why? In the same work, Chesterton states the reason for his views on the subject, indeed, very succinctly—and very precisely; when rebutting the arguments of his adversaries, he says about them that

> They were quite sure that their economic rules were rigid, that their political theory was right, that their commerce was beneficent, that their parliaments were popular, that their press was enlightened, that their science was humane. In this confidence they committed their people to certain new and enormous experiments; to making their own independent nation an eternal debtor to a few rich men; to piling up private property in heaps on the faith of financiers; to covering their land with iron and stone and stripping it of grass and grain; to driving food out of their own country in the hope of buying it back again from the ends of the earth; […] and all hanging on a thread of alien trade which grew thinner and thinner.[70]

Now, it is enough only to combine this citation with what has been said above, and the explanation becomes obvious; the fundamental motivation for the plan of "agricultural reconstruction" was very simple indeed; and it was—to secure English people materially, in the most basic manner possible: as to food supplies.

However, does all this exhaust the matter?

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[68] Henryk ZINST, *Historia Anglii* (Wrocław, Warszawa, Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich Wydawnictwo, 2001), 319.

[69] Gilbert Keith CHESTERTON, *The Outline of Sanity* (Rookhope: Aziloth Books, 2011), 75.

[70] Ibid., 30–31.

Emphatically—no. And to prove it, all an inquirer has to do is to examine one more passage from the same *Irish Impressions* (containing very many such illuminating remarks; which only contributes to the topic as to what is, in Chesterton's case, center and what periphery). In the aforesaid passage, Chesterton—while making some general remarks about the social and economic conditions of the world of his time—discusses the social character and aim of the contemporary social protests, and comments that

> the only object of striking is liberty; and the only object of liberty is life: a thing wholly spiritual. It is economic liberty that should be dismissed as these people dismiss theology. We only get it, to forget it. It is right that men should have houses, right that they should have land, right that they should have laws to protect the land; but all these things are only machinery to make leisure for the labouring soul. The house is only a stage set up by stage carpenters for the acting of what Mr. J. B. Yeats has called "the drama of the home." All the most dramatic things happen at home, from being born to being dead. What a man thinks about these things is his life; and to substitute for them a bustle of electioneering and legislation is to wander about among screens and pulleys on the wrong side of pasteboard scenery; and never to act the play. And that play is always a miracle play; and the name of its hero is Everyman.[71]

Now (and again), this passage is so self-evidently clear, that it hardly needs any commentary; social organization is but a "machinery to make leisure for labouring soul"; in other words: to provide people with "liberty." With the object of this liberty being what Chesterton calls "life: a thing wholly spiritual." Now, obviously, "spiritual" here is by no means an accidental term, especially that it is accompanied by several other terms of the same register (like "soul" and "miracle") that together with it form quite a decent "textual dominant"; and it clearly signifies a sphere of existence transcending the totality of material affairs, which is especially underlined by the reference to life and death. What Chesterton, thus, has in mind here, are not just the ordinary day-to-day affairs, the necessary trifles human beings have to care for in order to sustain their bodily functions—but something much more profound.

What exactly? It is, for obvious reasons, difficult to establish. Perhaps, after a careful research, it would be discovered, at least with a certain degree of probability, that it is indeed something identical or very similar to the Maritainian "superexistence of intellection and love"; perhaps the word "play" serves here as a sort of hint, especially that Thomas Aquinas in

[71] CHESTERTON, *Irish Impressions*, 141–142.

describing contemplation employed a strikingly similar metaphor.[72] Perhaps (and it would certainly seem so), "liberty" Chesterton writes about is not a simple liberty of choice, but this deeper "liberty of spontaneity," that plays so important a role in Maritain's system. Or, perhaps, it is just a coincidence; however it might be, one thing seems to remain quite clear, at least; and this other dimension of life might be called "personal," in the most precise Thomist sense. And that to this aspect of life, to the life of the person as person, distinct from the material needs of individuality, society has no access; it cannot provide it; it cannot modify it; all it can do is to set up "a stage" for it to develop on its own and according to its own nature. Or, in other words, furnish people with *material conditions,* preparatory for the advent of this higher good.

And this, precisely, is the Maritainian notion of common good. Just as in the case of the nature of social life, it is not an identity; it is not the direct similarity; but it is a deeper convergence as to the most vital intellectual sources of the matter; that, perhaps, means much more than thousands of more superficial points of agreement.

There remains very little to add; perhaps nothing. Perhaps all that remains is to quote the telling words of William Oddie, in which he observes the actuality of Chesterton's thought, saying that "Chesterton's idea on monopoly, on marriage and family, on eugenics, above all on the dignity of human person […] were all directly pertinent to modern Catholic teaching."[73] Indeed, "above all the dignity of the person"; for Chesterton was a personalist thinker. And even though, because of his professional responsibilities, and perhaps of the type of his character also, he never raised to the level of discourse accessible to Jacques Maritain, this analogy definitely *is not* of an accidental nature.

And if so, Chesterton has still very many things to say.

CLOSING REMARKS

Thus, the present analysis has come to a close; obviously, it is out of sheer necessity much too general and narrow to be called "comprehensive." However, it seems to be—potentially at least—of a certain use; and this "certain use" is what this the nature of which last section will attempt to establish.

[72] Josef PIEPER, *Leisure as the Basis of Culture (Including The Philosophical Act)*, trans. Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 34.

[73] ODDIE, *Chesterton and the Romance*, 378.

For even if we do accept the conclusion that Gilbert Keith Chesterton was a personalist thinker (which is most advisable), what good will come of it?

Firstly, there is a cognitive, or—better say—intellectual good. Cardinal John Henry Newman, in a truly classical manner, reminded his readers (*Idea of a University*) that knowledge is its own reward; and it is difficult to find a deeper and more profound statement indeed; or, anyhow, a statement more characteristic (though less and less so) for the civilization of the West. Now, discovering that Chesterton was a personalist thinker opens an avenue for a new way of research and, probably, a thorough reinterpretation of his heritage. And if knowledge is its own reward, this piece of knowledge shall be its own reward also; and how.

Secondly, there is the political good. Chesterton's political works, numerous and voluminous, have always been subjected to a significant number of misunderstandings and crooked interpretations, some resulting from mere ignorance, some from plain ill-will. Uncovering their personalist character might help to clear them from all the false accusations and reveal their true essence and character, which—in this paradoxical age of ours—might contribute greatly to the public life of the West.

Thirdly—and lastly—there is what might be called the social good; and it is the good of personalism as such. Now, personalism is a complex philosophical doctrine, a fruit of high intellectualism of the universities; and although Jacques Maritain was a masterful writer, it might be doubted whether his books are ever going to be widely read. Chesterton's books, on the other hand, were once widely read—and begin to be widely read again. Had thus Chesterton (or GKC, as the enthusiasts of his work call him around the world) been a personalist, he might provide personalism with a bridge that could help it cross the abyss that separates (and with time, as it seems, more and more decidedly) academic life from the mainstream of public debate. His works are, so to speak, "philosophy incarnated"; they are ripe with intellectual reflexion, but they also distribute it in a way suited for the needs of popular reader and ordinary social debate.

In the context of Polish intellectual life there is yet another special point we have to make, being—so to speak—an "inversion" of the first one. It has just been said that this study might allow the academia to know Chesterton better, which is its own reward; however, it does not seem completely unreasonable to suggest that in the process of such a comparative analysis, it is only the main object that is known better—but also this which serves as the point of departure; and that analyzing Chesterton's thought and work

"through" the ideas conceived by other thinkers might prove beneficial for the understanding of these very ideas that serve us as our "intellectual lens" as well. Now, one might wonder what would happen if the same or only similar topic was analyzed from the perspective defined not by the works of Jacques Maritain, but—say—one Karol Wojtyła (excluded from this text only because it is never good to invite too many geniuses to a luncheon); what would that mean for the self-consciousness of Polish philosophical thought? What could it mean for its recognition abroad? Knowledge is its own reward, true enough—but if by acquiring knowledge one might accidentally render patriotic service to his Motherland (which is only fitting for a European soul), all the better.

Therefore, to sum it up, at least there is hope that this little study, with all its faults, has not been in vain.

Times are transitory; after a short period of peace, West once again faces a crisis of identity, as usual resulting in terrible political turmoil and—unfortunately—the radicalization of thought and action. It is difficult to prophetize about the outcome of the current accidents. One thing, however remains clear; and if the West recovers for itself the sense of the inherent dignity of the human person, if it comprehends it and allows it to become manifest in the work of its intellect and in its *praxis*, there is still hope; and whatever the future holds, and whatever the shape that the Western civilization might take, with this principle in minds and hearts of the people—there is nothing to fear. And the world might see yet the dawn of the New Christendom.

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„PIGMEJE I ŚPIĄCY OLBRZYM": TOMISTYCZNY PERSONALIZM W MYŚLI SPOŁECZNEJ I POLITYCZNEJ GILBERTA KEITHA CHESTERTONA

Streszczenie

Celem tekstu jest ujawnienie i opisanie personalistycznych elementów dystrybucjonizmu i nacjonalizmu Gilberta Keitha Chestertona. W pierwszej części zostają wyjaśnione podstawowe pojęcia: „personalizm" oraz „tomizm," czemu towarzyszy próba skonstruowania ogólnego zarysu personalizmu tomistycznego, przeprowadzona na zasadzie analizy poglądów personalisty tomistycznego

par excellence — Jacques'a Maritaina. Druga część tekstu skupia się na analizie poglądów samego Chestertona oraz na udowodnieniu, że był on w ścisłym tego słowa znaczeniu myślicielem społecznym, że jego nacjonalizm wykazuje wiele zaskakujących analogii z Maritainowską koncepcją życia społecznego, jego dystrybucjonizm zaś opiera się na koncepcji dobra wspólnego, analogicznej do tej, którą opracował francuski filozof. Tekst wieńczą pewne ogólne uwagi na temat potencjalnych korzyści płynących z podobnej analizy.

Słowa kluczowe: Chesterton; dobro wspólne; dystrybucjonizm; Maritain; nacjonalizm; personalizm; tomizm.

"PYGMIES AND SLEEPING GIANT": THOMIST PERSONALISM IN THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT OF GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

Summary

The aim of the text is to uncover and describe personalist elements of Gilbert Keith Chesterton's nationalism and distributism. First part of the text is concerned with clarifying basic notions, so—with explaining the meaning of the terms "personalism" and "Thomist personalism," and presenting the most basic intellectual framework of Thomist personalist philosophy, which is done by the means of analyzing the thought of Thomist personalist par excellence—Jacques Maritain. The second part of the text concentrates on the analysis of Chesterton's ideas, proving—consequently—that he was a social thinker, that his notion of nationalism corresponds in a striking manner to Maritain's concept of social life, and his distributist views—to Maritain's concept of the common good. The text ends with several general remarks that aim at establishing certain possible advantages this analysis might produce.

Key words: Chesterton; common good; distributism; Maritain; nationalism; personalism; Thomism.