ABSTRACT

PLACED PEOPLE:
ROOTEDNESS IN G. K. CHESTERTON, C. S. LEWIS, AND WENDELL BERRY

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This dissertation examines how G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, and Wendell Berry answer one of the central questions of modernity: “What are people for?” Their answers are crucial to a humanities that is increasingly individualistic and fragmented. Charles Taylor and other virtue and communitarian philosophers are used to help explain the connections between these three authors. Examining how the writings of Chesterton, Lewis, and Berry confront the increasingly commercial, materialist, utilitarian, ends-justify-the-means culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries will help underscore the relevance of such literature to our current humanities. The authors deserve to be considered because they provide unique insights to contemporary questions.

Their insights are unique because these authors acknowledge and privilege the role that the teleological Aristotelian and Judeo-Christian traditions have had in shaping Western thought and thus they see a rooted return to these traditions, or at least the values of these traditions, as central to restoring health to our communities. Specifically, this rooted perspective leads to loving things (including people) for themselves, embracing limits, and having a communal, rather than individualistic, view of the world. The first part of chapter one discusses how Chesterton, Lewis, and Berry rejected the contemporary modern narrative for humanity and returned to a rooted perspective in a tradition approximating orthodoxy. The second part of chapter one looks at examples of this homecoming in their fiction. The second chapter first explores the relationship between the rooted perspective of these authors and ethics, and then shows how this ethical theory informs their similarly rooted and localized economic theories. The third chapter argues that their ethics allows them (and us) to have respect for other individuals, communities, and the natural world. The fourth chapter seeks to answer the question, “What does it mean to be human?” It examines what Chesterton, Lewis, and Berry say about “wholeness,” and then suggests that their emphasis on wholeness should be an important inclusion in the humanities. A brief concluding chapter summarizes the entire argument and underscores the importance of including Chesterton, Lewis, and Berry in the canon of the humanities.