

"human weeds."⁴⁶ She believed the best way to kill weeds is to kill their roots, while admitting that Planned Parenthood does "not want word to get out that we want to exterminate the Negro population."⁴⁷ Clearly, according to the social Darwinist, "the struggle of race with race (culminates in) the survival of the physically and mentally fitter race."⁴⁸

Clearly Darwin was a racist, as *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* show, and believed in the superiority of his race over those he called "savages." His works are full of references belittling "inferior" races and inferior people in his own race, and he approved of their subjugation and extinction. These references and beliefs were more than enough for his followers to feed upon, and the parasitic disease of social Darwinism spread like the cancer they strove to protect. In the name of progress, people were conquered and subjugated, and schemes were spewed forth to preserve and advance their own "superior" race. Clearly, the theory of evolution needs to be reexamined. Irrefutably, scientifically endorsed racism is founded upon Charles Darwin.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., 275.

Patrick Pearse and the Triumph of Failure

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Only Cuchulainn, the Hound of Ulster, remained, fatally wounded, his side and stomach gaping with wounds. He bound himself with his sword-belt to a pillar-stone, *Carrig-an-Compan*, so that he might die standing, facing his enemies. And so he did, with drawn sword in hand, a raven perched on his shoulder, the rays of the setting sun bright on his bronze helmet, a terror even in death to his enemies.¹

Patrick Pearse's idealistic ways were set when he founded St. Enda's College in 1908 and emblazoned a quote of Cuchulainn's upon a wall so that all his students would see it. "I care not though I were to live but one day and one night, if only my fame and my deeds live after me." This was Patrick Pearse speaking through Cuchulainn; he too saw himself as fighting an unbeatable foe and he also knew that one day he would be killed in this fight. It was with this mind set and with this Irish hero in his thoughts that Pearse set out on that fateful Monday in 1916 to lead the Easter Rising, an Irish revolt against British occupation. Pearse dreamed of being a hero to his country and wanted his deeds to live on after him.

Patrick (Padraic) Pearse was born on November 10, 1879, on Great Brunswick Street, now Pearse Street, in Dublin. His father was James Pearse, a English sculptor. Politically, James was a proponent of Home Rule, a proposed through which Ireland would remain a part of the British Empire but with self-government. His fathers one literary work was a pamphlet entitled *England's duty to Ireland* as it appears to an

¹Deamond Williams, *The Irish Struggle 1912-1936* (London, 1967), 1.

Englishman, his thesis being: "you ought not force a mode of government upon an unwilling people. And you cannot forever do so, whether you ought to or not."² Patrick's mother was Margaret Brady. She was 20 when she married the 37-year-old Pearse, who was marrying for the second time. Little is known about her except that she was from the county of Meath and that she would sing to Patrick in Irish and tell him Gaelic stories. The Irish and British parentage provided the mixed background common to Irish patriots.

Patrick Pearse was educated by the Christian Brothers and received his B.A. in 1901, then entered the Law practice as a barrister. This profession was not to his liking, and he made very few appearances as counsel. His only case of any importance was one he tried in 1905. He represented a man who was being fined for writing his name on his cart in "illegible" script, that is to say, in the Irish language, Gaelic. His defense was described by the presiding judge as "very ingenious, interesting, and from a literary point of view, instructive."³ Nonetheless, he lost the case and never tried another. He later referred to the law as the most ignoble of all professions. Instead, Pearse found his calling in education.

St. Enda's College, an experimental bilingual secondary school in Rathmines, was founded by Pearse in 1908. The language and sports of the school were all conducted in Irish, and many analysts have described Pearse's style as ahead of his time. He later described his philosophy on education in a 1912 essay:

What the teacher should bring to his pupils is not a set of ready-made opinions, or a stock of cut-and-dry information, but an inspiration and an example; and his main qualification should be, not such an overmastering will as shall impose itself at all hazards upon all weaker wills that come under its influence, but rather so infectious an enthusiasm as shall enkindle new enthusiasm.⁴

²F. X. Martin, *Leaders and Men of the Easter Rising Dublin 1916* (Ithaca, 1967), 152.

³George Dangerfield, *The Damnable Question: A Study in Anglo-Irish Relations* (Boston, 1976), 138.

⁴Martin, *Leaders and Men*, 154.

Pearse's teaching philosophy described a man who wanted to inspire and enlighten his students. He wanted to be remembered as an inspiration and an example to the youth of the country.

Once when Pearse was told by a father, "My son is good at nothing but playing a tin whistle," and asked, "What am I to do with him?" Pearse replied, "Buy a tin whistle for him."⁵ His attitude challenged the established educational norms and as a result, many members of the educational establishment looked down upon St. Enda's. But, these progressive ideas contained a view that nationalism had a place in the classroom. Pearse felt that an Irish nationalistic tradition must be taught to schoolchildren. This is the time where Pearse's nationalism began to develop. Pearse was fascinated with the idea of inspiring his students with Irish songs and stories. He longed to imbue the stories of Irish heroes into the hearts and minds of his students and thus help arouse nationalistic sentiment. He saw no incompatibility between the roles of educator and propagandist.

Pearse had exhibited strong nationalistic beliefs in his youth and as soon as he was sixteen, he joined the Gaelic League, a social club devoted to greater independence for Ireland. However, in 1913, he began to find the non-political aspect of the work tiresome. He began to look to the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.), a more radical group, for guidance. During this time, Pearse was making a name for himself as a charismatic orator who could lead people. It was due to this reputation that he was invited to make the annual speech at the grave of Ireland's first official martyr, Wolfe Tone. This speech cemented Pearse's reputation as a highly-skilled orator who had the power to inspire and it was the main reason Pearse was invited to join the I.R.B.

Before Pearse was invited to join the I.R.B., it came under the control of a generation of younger men, allowing Pearse to have a stronger voice in the direction in which the group was heading. The man who made this possible was Tom Clarke, who in 1913 was 56 years old. He possessed "a young man's enthusiasm tempered by an iron discipline."⁶ He represented the older generation, men who otherwise would have dismissed the young upstarts. But with his support, the new generation gained

⁵Dangerfield, *Damnable Question*, 139.

⁶Martin, *Leaders and Men*, 101.

widespread support. Pearse impressed Clarke and he was granted membership in the I.R.B. At the same time, Pearse was also granted membership into another radical Irish group, the Irish Volunteers. Before Pearse joined these groups he knew of their overt purpose: to challenge conscription and partition. But at this time, Pearse discovered that both groups had a covert purpose: to mount a rising before the war ended. He reacted with strong enthusiasm; he now saw an opportunity to fulfil his dream.

Pearse rose rapidly to positions of prominence in both organizations. He was a principal orator and he served on the planning committees for both organizations. In May 1915, he was appointed to a three-man committee established by the Supreme Council of the I.R.B. to create a plan for a military insurrection. For the rest of this year Pearse planned and organized this rising. He traveled throughout Ireland delivering speeches and attempting to gain support. Although he traveled much his main support was found in Dublin.

On April 24, 1916, Pearse's chance to fulfill his destiny arrived. Easter Monday, just before noon, a group of about 150 men lined up in ranks in Dublin. They were an odd assortment of men; they carried a mixture of rifles, shotguns, and handguns. The few people on the street gave little notice to the group. Various small groups had been marching around Dublin playing "soldier" recently.⁷ Something was very different this Monday; however, for when the men reached the General Post Office (GPO) in downtown Dublin, a command was issued: "The GPO - Charge!"

The men quickly took control of the building, removed the Union Jack, and replaced it with a Green, White, and Orange Tricolor Flag. This was the first time that this flag, the current flag of the Irish Republic, had flown over Dublin. Around the city, small groups of rebels attacked British positions and attempted to take control of parts of the city. But, before the rising had begun, two major setbacks had occurred: one, the sinking of the *Axel*, a German ship carrying arms to Ireland, and two, Eoin MacNeill, the leader of the Irish Volunteers, ordered that all Volunteer movements for the whole Easter weekend be called off. MacNeill traveled around Ireland on April 23rd and convinced most of the

⁷Richard Killeen, *The Easter Rising* (New York, 1995), 5.

rural populace that the rising was off. The leaders of the rising in Dublin, however, were determined. They had some arms, although fewer than they would have wished, and fewer men than they would have wanted. They knew that MacNeill's order would keep most Volunteers at home, but they expected enough people to make a show.

The British responded early Tuesday morning. General W.H.M. Lowe and 5,000 British soldiers arrived and began to set up a cordon around the rebel positions. By now it was clear that MacNeill's order was having two devastating effects. First, the number of people turning out to fight was low and secondly, the I.R.B. and the Irish Volunteers were not rising across the country. Dublin was on her own.

Wednesday included some of the most intense fighting of the Rising. General Lowe did not have much respect for the rebels and believed they would break easily if attacked. The British first assaulted the Mendicity Institution, a building occupied by twenty to twenty-five rebels, most near twenty years of age. The British attempted several frontal assaults but each one failed. Finally, after the building had been attacked for several hours, it was surrounded and the remainder of the force surrendered. By the time they had surrendered, the rebels had inflicted over one hundred casualties of the British force.⁸ At Kingston, the British had landed another contingent of troops. As they attempted to cross the Mount Street Bridge over the Liffey River, they were ambushed by forces of the Irish Volunteers. The fight began at noon and went on until late in the evening. During the battle, the British lost 200 men while the rebels lost only twelve.⁹

A man who shared Pearse's vision of nationalism was The O'Rahilly. His baptismal name was Michael Joseph O'Rahilly, but he took the title of a Gaelic Clan Chief, hence his name was "The O'Rahilly." He supported the actions of Eoin MacNeill and traveled over the countryside telling people not to rebel. However, when he returned to Dublin, he saw that part of the rising was going forward. He knew that without the support of the countryside, it was doomed from the start, yet he felt that in

⁸*Ibid.*, 23.

⁹*Ibid.*, 24.

all honor, he should join it.¹⁰ He fought with gallantry and was particularly concerned to see that no harm came to the British soldiers taken prisoners. He died with the utmost courage while leading a breakout from the burning GPO.

On Thursday, April 27, the tide began to seriously turn against the rebels. A full Brigade of Artillery had arrived and it was pounding the City of Dublin relentlessly. The rebels began a general withdrawal to positions near the General Post Office. On Friday, the G.P.O. itself was under heavy attack. The roof caught fire at 4 p.m. and the rebels were forced to abandon it. As the GPO burned, the last major fighting of the Rising was taking place on North King Street. Rebels had prepared defensive positions and a barricade to block this vital thoroughfare. General Lowe, the British commander, had a cautious plan worked out to flush the Irish out. However, earlier that day, General Sir John Maxwell, who had very little respect for the rebels and believed they would easily be routed, ordered a frontal attack on the position. The battle raged from 6 p.m. Friday until morning Saturday. By some tragic coincidence, the British troops that were attacking were the same that had been mauled at the Mount Street Bridge on Wednesday and after several bloody and fruitless attempts to take the positions, some of the soldiers began to crack. They broke into some of the surrounding homes and began to attack unarmed civilians. By the time they were done, fifteen innocent men had been murdered.¹¹ On Saturday morning, the nationalists decided to surrender. At 2:30 p.m. Pearse took off his sword and handed it to General Maxwell. The leaders were court-martialed and fifteen of them were sentenced to die. Patrick Pearse was the first man to be executed.

One aspect of Pearse's personality that must be examined is that he was prepared to assume a role in this rising that practically guaranteed his execution. The reason can be understood only through an examination of his writings before the rising. He concluded that his generation had lost their right to be free because they were decadent and servile. He felt the only way they could be rejuvenated was through a blood sacrifice. Pearse once wrote, "May it not be said with entire truth that the reason

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 36.

why Ireland is not free is that Ireland has not deserved to be free?"¹² He was convinced that the right to freedom could only be won through the use of arms; he promoted open rebellion and seemed unbothered by the bloodshed that was sure to follow. He wrote in December 1915, "bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation that regards it as a final horror has lost its manhood."¹³

The Rising has been described as the "Triumph of Failure." The executions made martyrs of the leaders and their deaths revived the spirit of Irish separatism, which eventually led to independence in 1922. The Rising also changed the debate for Irish Independence. Before the majority of Irish supported Home Rule (a national Parliament in charge of domestic affairs) or at most a gradual independence. After this rebellion people began to look at independence through force as a real possibility. For every hour the rebels had held out more Irish were being convinced that a full scale rebellion was possible. Pearse was obsessed with the idea of a bloody Rising that would serve as the catalyst for a larger revolution. He saw the violence as not only a political but also a spiritual and moral force.¹⁴ He foresaw that the Rising was doomed to fail and this did not bother him. While he was imprisoned in Arbour Hill Barracks after the Rising, he wrote to his mother: "We are ready to die and we shall die cheerfully and proudly. Personally, I do not hope or hope to even desire to live."¹⁵ Pearse saw in Cuchulainn the man he wanted to be; he hoped to be martyred and remembered as an executed patriot. Also in the letter to his mother he wrote, "Our deeds last week are the most splendid in Ireland's history. People will say hard things about us now, but we shall be remembered by posterity and blessed by unborn generations."¹⁶ He did not care about his life; all that mattered to him was that his name and deeds lived on after him.

¹²Martin, *Leaders and Men*, 160.

¹³*Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁴Sean Farrell Moran, "Patrick Pearse and the European Revolt against Reason," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (October-December 1989): 627.

¹⁵Leon Broin, *Dublin Castle and the 1916 Rising* (New York, 1971), 129.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 128.