Resonances of the Age of Enlightenment in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby

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Abstract: The American civilization being an offspring and realization of the European Enlightenment project bears strong resemblances to the Age of Enlightenment, both historically — in the form of embracing a set of doctrines, and attitudinally — projecting an ethos, an attitude. This paper endeavours to analyse Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby in the light of the Enlightenment philosophy and times. The paper tries to locate resonances of the Enlightenment through specific philosophical tags that identify the characters, such as — cynic, sceptic, etc. The paper also endeavours to locate the novel within the broad spectrum of Enlightenment project, but also at the same time it excavates and brings forth the various references to the Age in the novel with all its idiosyncrasies and connotations, which is central to the author’s own underlying philosophical temperament and attitude. The paper also focuses on two things in its discussion of the text, firstly — Humean scepticism in the novel as a unitive force, and secondly — Plato’s metaphysical system of forms as a dissociative force.

Key words: Enlightenment, Hume, Scepticism, Cynicism, Impressions, Ideas, Forms, Reason.

Introduction:

The American Roaring Twenties or the crazy years portrayed in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby were a mélange of flappers, fast cars, jazz music, exquisite parties, post war patriotism, cultural skepticism, and disillusionment. The tension between the past and the present, the “consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment” (Mayne 1964: 13) was the temperament of the age. This paper attempts to analyze The Great Gatsby viz-a-viz the Age of Enlightenment.

The period of Enlightenment ranges from 1650 to 1770 (Lavine 1984: 134). The histories of philosophy at times use the term ‘empiricism’ to refer to the philosophical temperament of the period, which was a counter to the ‘rationalism’ of the previous era. To call Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz (‘rationalists’), or to hail Locke, Berkeley and Hume (‘empiricists’) as the dominant representatives of the age would be unjust. Any kind of label given to the age would deprive it of its coherence and will only lead to a distorted picture of the times. Stuart Brown is against tagging the age to a ‘school’, he believes the Enlightenment to be a single European phenomenon, which is unifying and coherent in nature (Brown 1996: 2).

The novel has two prominent echoes of the Age of Enlightenment— “historical” and “attitudinal” (Osborne 2005: 2) — through which we can trace the influence and the culmination of Enlightenment philosophy in the text. Thomas Osborne describes the “historical” as a specific dogma — the uniting spirit of the age and family of intellectual ideas that emphasize the primacy of reason in all spheres of life, the love of science, the belief in progress, and the distrust of all religious and superstitious presuppositions; while the “attitudinal” means a kind of ethos, rather than a series of historical doctrines (Osborne 2005, vi).

It is almost impossible to include all the philosophers and their philosophies in this paper to analyze the text at hand; therefore I had to truncate my selection of philosophers.

I

The epistemological progression of the novel is weaved with a fine interlacement of Gatsby’s idealism and Nick’s cynicism. Nick’s narration, the voice of “selective delicacy” (Ruland & Bradbury 1991: 299) gradually unravels partially, if not completely the elusive figure of Gatsby. A myriad of filtered emotions and impressions trace the growth of Nick’s understanding of Gatsby’s nature. Fitzgerald’s or rather Nick’s use of definite, constant, and specific adjectives to describe the characters throughout the text bear strong philosophical connotations.

Nick’s cynicism and Gatsby’s idealism remind us of the delightful expression by Amory in This Side of Paradise that seems to be the kernel of
Fitzgerald’s philosophical standpoint throughout his life – “I’m a cynical idealist” (Fitzgerald, 1920, 2000: 77). When Nick first visits Daisy, he observes that Jordan Baker has “mastered a certain hardy skepticism”. This view recurs, when Nick even in his infatuated state believes that Baker “dealt in universal skepticism”.

Pyrrho founded scepticism. It is the philosophical position of doubt concerning the reliability of knowledge. It doubts and denies the possibility of knowledge. The seeds of scepticism were embedded in the Sophist’s epistemology, religion and ethics (Masih 2006)

Baker’s scepticism is not Pyrrhonian, but Humean in nature. It is ‘moderate’. Her instinctual belief in the external world makes her function in a specific manner that allows her to deduce the outcomes of events in a certain way. The empiricist philosopher David Hume’s idea of ‘moderate scepticism’ emphasized that reason disjunct from imagination cannot solve our doubts, but there can be a possible system of thought based on our natural propensities (Masih 2006: 326-29). Moderate scepticism has an impact on the belief system; it causes impartiality in the thinker, and this is transparent in Baker’s fair-minded actions. Baker spends her time playing golf, gossiping, socializing, attending parties, acting confidante to Daisy, but also subtly executes Gatsby’s plan to manipulate Nick to set up a clandestine meeting with Daisy. She is impartial in her conduct. Her decisions are based on objective criteria rather than on prejudices.

Through moderate skepticism, the rational mind helps to draw inferences from impressions, and carefully evaluates claims and deduces the outcome, the truth. Hume believed that truth lies in custom or habit of imagination and not in reason. True thinking has to be sensitive and not cogitative in nature (Masih 2006: 326-29).

Baker’s scepticism and her art of deduction is at its height when Daisy and Tom murmur audibly in “the room beyond” regarding the telephone call during dinner. Baker “leaned forward, unashamed, trying to hear”. The events of private murmurings of a married couple triggered off by an untimely telephone call – in a “room beyond” – in the presence of outsiders arrange in a sequence within Baker’s mind to create the complete picture – that “Tom’s got some woman in New York”, which she thought everyone already knew. If this is true, then her “unashamed” eavesdropping is ethical for her to reinforce her opinions about Tom more emphatically. From the synthesis of the ideas of senses, she opined that the telephone call at dinner was indeed from Tom’s mistress. Her reason had a propensity to seek application beyond the cognitive context, while the work of critique should be to circumscribe reason’s epistemic application to the bounds of knowledge. Philosophers have often employed this feature to prove the existence of God throughout history. It would also later become a powerful tool in the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School (Rush, 2004).

Nick’s homodiegetic narrative is marked by the phrases such as “it seemed,” “I suppose,” “perhaps,” “possibly.” “I’ve heard it said,” “as though,” “as if,” and similar phrases that show that his narrative is laden with endless alternative layers of interpretation and possibilities of speculation. Nick offers dubitable standpoints every time he uses these phrases, which in turn crumbles the very logicality of the progression of plot based on events that can either be certain or uncertain. Therefore, every time scepticism resurfaces, opinions triumph.

For the empiricists, there is no absolute knowledge; all that we can claim is that we have opinions. Baker/Nick has no absolute knowledge, but only opinions, like the readers who have no knowledge about the certainty of the plot, but only opinions fabricated out of Nick’s doubtful, uncertain observations. He too, like Baker, is a Humean sceptic, and the realization of this identification takes place in Gatsby’s library— “Taking our skepticism for granted, he (the owl-eyed man) rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the Stoddard Lectures” (Fitzgerald 2000: 47). The pronoun “our” is the common intersecting point of their thought and ideology.

II

It is after Chapter 4 that things start to fall apart as we see these characters in a different philosophical light altogether. Nick and Baker’s scepticism has hurled them upon a great voyage to discover “absolute” truths about the reality of things – the God’s truth.” The words – “absolute” and “absolutely” – occur numerous times in the text. Daisy inquires of Nick: “Is this absolutely where you live, my dearest one?” Yet Daisy also quite exaggeratedly calls Nick “an absolute rose.” Baker refuses the four cocktails and exclaims, “I’m absolutely in training.” In Gatsby’s library, the owl-eyed man describes the books to Nick and Baker in a similar fashion —“Absolutely real — have pages and everything.” This “absolutely real” reality is similar to Plato’s intelligible world in The
Baker’s attitude of scepticism is speculative (as it “seemed” to Nick); Daisy’s attitude is her own opinion. The speculative image of Baker, and Daisy’s opinion of her own self, creates impressions so strong in Nick that they last throughout the novel. Daisy believes she is — “pretty cynical about everything” (Fitzgerald 2000: 21).

Daisy’s understanding of the meaning of the word ‘cynical’ is undoubtedly spurious. Contrarily it seems that Nick is more of a cynic than Daisy, and it manifest in two occasions. In Chapter 1, when Nick observes the “basic insincerity” in Daisy’s voice, he exclaims as though “the whole evening has been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me” (Fitzgerald 2000: 22). Again, in Chapter 5, when Gatsby tries to offer him a side job to earn a “nice bit of money”, Nick realizes “that under different circumstances that conversation might have been one of the crises of (his) life. But because the offer was obviously and tactlessly for a service to be rendered, (he) had no choice except to cut him off there” (Fitzgerald 2000: 80).

Y. Masih points out that for the cynics even a good fortune has to be dreaded than welcomed because it is both precarious and is not a reward of their virtues (Masih 2006: 115). These two episodes mentioned before, highlight a strong cynical characteristic of Nick, one that is of doubt, a general distrust of others’ motives, since motives veil desires and ambitions which for the cynic is unattainable and meaningless and therefore to be abstained from. Cynicism is basically a negative philosophy of life (Masih 2006: 118). The character of Nick is a bit problematic in nature, as he seems to display a plethora of philosophical standpoints. It is tremendously difficult to tag Nick to any one specific philosophical school.

In Chapter 1, Nick believes that he is “inclined to reserve all judgments”, which is emphasized when he further affirms that reserving “judgments is a matter of infinite hope.” The fact that we enter the novel through Nick’s narration is because he denies his state of ἀταραξία (ataraxia). Ataraxia means ‘composure’, ‘equanimity’ (Watts, 2008). Masih writes that the years preceding Aenesidemus’s teachings the sceptics constructed this ethical condition of ataraxia. Since, the moral opinions were based on unreliable conventions, the apt duty for them was to suspend their judgements, and without judgement, there can be no will or action. The withdrawal from the events of the external world seemed too radical for other skeptics who believed that that life demanded action and conduct, and therefore they embraced probability as the guide to actions (Masih 2006: 134).

Hume believed that this kind of Pyrrhonism was incompatible with human nature and writes that if these “principles were universally and steadily accepted; all human life would come to an end” (Steinberg 1993). Epictetus emphasized the fact that our actions are ‘up to us’ and by claiming this he creates a model of the human psychology. He believed that although humans and non-human are motivated by ‘impressions’ and ‘appearances,’ it is the rational beings (humans) for whom rational impression has ‘propositional content,’ that is, a meaning that can be expressed in a statement ‘this act is right/wrong.’ Our impressions require affirmation before they can influence the impulse to take an action. Therefore, Epictetus emphasized two ideas—firstly, human beings should examine the content of their impressions and secondly, that human beings should withhold (“reserve”) assent to their impressions until they are sure about the causality.

The Stoic Chrysippus responded to this problem by delineating that the way we form impressions and act upon them is partly caused by the external factors such as social constructs and influences (Gill 2009: xx).

The reason Nick un-reserves all his judgments in the course of the narrative is because firstly – it is an analeptic elegiac celebration of his “Great” Gatsby, this is his “Great” poetic narration of the life and times of his friend, and secondly – he was aware that the content of his impressions are genuine. Hume and Kant believed that man could only vouch for the knowledge of his immediate perceptions or the ‘phenomenal’ world. The metaphysical genuineness of ‘impressions’ therefore hides in the ‘idea’ of Gatsby’s identity, where according to Hume, ‘impressions’ are the immediate sensibilities, while ‘ideas’ are the faint copies of those impressions, accessed through the memory.

III

Gatsby’s deification and the absence of a religious authority in the text are important to understand the propensity towards self-celebration and atheism that had its roots in the European Enlightenment. Stuart Brown observes that there was a new tolerance of theological deviation that was moderately expressed during the time when philosophical books promoted heretical views on the Church and the Scriptures. The 17th century experienced the growth of atheism deistic works like Spinoza’s Tractates Theologico-Politicus, and Ethics, Locke’s The Reasonableness of Christianity, and John Toland’s Christianity not Mystery (Brown, 1996).

Spinoza believed that one should strive to understand God/nature with clarity of mind and that distinct intellectual knowledge would reveal nature’s most important truths and show how everything depends essentially on higher natural causes. The key to discovering and experiencing God/nature is philosophy and science, not religion.
The apotheosis of Gatsby is slow and takes up the whole of the narrative. We find the inception instantly after he introduces himself in Chapter 3 where Nick observes —

“It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it … It faced – or seemed to face – the whole eternal world before an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favour” (49).

Gatsby’s smile, which is eternal like the universe, draws Nick to him. Gatsby supports Nick’s pursuit of truth. It is only Nick, who gathers impressions in flux without acknowledging secondary opinions about Gatsby amid the “romantic speculation” of his guests. Therefore, the “Platonic” Truth — “I’m Gatsby” is revealed to him alone.

Gotthold Lessing wrote in his Anti Goeze that the ever-growing perfectibility of a man is found not in the possession, but of the pursuit of truth. What or who Gatsby is, remains an enigma for the idle speculators, but to Nick alone “God’s truth” is revealed in Chapter 4 when Gatsby raises his right hand to order divine retribution to stand by him. In two meetings where eternity/divinity is evoked twice, Nick’s response remains the same: in the party, there was “nothing sinister about him,” and again in the car he “wondered if there wasn’t something sinister about him, after all.” It is as if the evocation of divinity ruled out the possibility of Gatsby being sinister in reality. In both cases, Nick uses the word “see.” In the party he says, “I could see nothing sinister about him,” and in the car he exclaims, “I see”, after he learns about Gatsby’s origin. Gatsby’s theatrical revelation of himself and his origin instills a sense of clarity in Nick. This act of “see”-ing bears strong reflection to the idea of Kant’s ‘Aufklärung’. Kant believed that ‘Aufklärung’ is man’s emergence from his “self-incurred immaturity” (Rabinow 1991: 34) – the inability to use his own “understanding”, to see without the guidance of another, but by his own reason – the combination of cognition and logic. Nick fits in like a jigsaw puzzle in Kant’s definition of an enlightened man, but this is not coincidental. Gatsby attains the status of the “Great” because Nick has always seen and grasped the form of the ‘ideal’ Gatsby, the transcendental man, through ‘understanding’.

Nick ruminates about Gatsby in Chapter 6: “The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God” (95). Nick’s assertion is confirmed by the fact that Gatsby never accepts the role of his own parents in his life because the Gatsby of the visible world is a mere reflection of the Platonic ‘form’ of Gatsby. Gatsby being a Platonic “conception of himself” emphasizes that the real Gatsby who Nick beholds is different from the criminal one that others see. According to Plato – forms are stable, substances are numerous (Jowett, 2010), therefore, for the rest of the world Gatsby’s reality is that he is a person who “killed a man once,” who “was a German spy during the war,” who “was in the American army during the war,” who is an “Oggsford man,” and who has a plethora of romantically conjured up personae. Baker fails along with Tom and the others to “see” what Nick sees. When Baker exclaims that he is “just a man named Gatsby,” she sees only the flesh and blood mortal of the tangible world named Gatsby. The opinions of the people about Gatsby are articulated, expressed in speech, while Nick’s beliefs are never articulated; they are expressed in his meditations and wonderings. Nick writes of Gatsby: “He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp like the mind of God” (107).

This statement draws out the inevitable contrast between Daisy’s “perishable breath” and Gatsby’s immortal mind. The ideal cannot unite with the reflection; therefore Gatsby’s yearning was forever a futile one. Moreover, Gatsby was a member of the ‘Trinity Quad’ and his funeral being held at “three o’ clock” very subtly makes it clear that Fitzgerald indeed gave him a post in the squad of the Holy Trinity, sometimes as the Father (begetter of oneself), as the Son (Gatsby himself) and as the Holy Spirit (the untainted spirit that died believing in the green light). Paternal links are denied in the favour of the theme of Gatsby’s self-invention. This is very much in keeping with Joyce’s notion of consubstantiation in Ulysses as drawn from Sabellius’ idea that “the Father was Himself His Own Son” (Joyce 1922, 2000: 267).

Nick’s apotheosizing of Gatsby can even be explained with a reference to Descartes’ Third Meditation, where the idea of God is an idea of a supremely perfect or an infinite, unlimited being. Since nothing comes from nothing and everything comes from something, therefore the idea of something is for that idea to exist in our mind. This means that if Nick has the idea of an infinite being, then the infinite being exists (Stutcliffe 1968). While Gatsby’s mind seems to romp like that of God, Nick’s mind seems to romp like Descartes’. He perceives Gatsby as a ‘form’, for him Gatsby is a Humean “idea”, a concept, a faint copy of his impressions. His version of Gatsby is totally psychological or mental, a reminiscence (Lavine, 1984), the truth of which he fails to convey to others, and therefore he gradually alienates himself from the people—Tom, Daisy, and finally Baker—who fail to see Gatsby’s higher form. Gatsby seems to exist in a parallel world simultaneously throughout the text. In the ‘ideal’ world, in Nick’s mind he remains immortal, as a “Great” man, “a son of God,” but simultaneously in the external ‘visible’ world of ‘opinion’ he dies as the “poor son-of-a-bitch.” In the novel, Humean empirical scepticism becomes the reason for bonding, a common philosophy that initially brings Nick closer to other people. It is unitive; while Platonic
metaphysical systems of forms lead to a breach between Nick and the others. It is dissociative.

IV

There are two god substitutes in the text—one is Gatsby and the other is T.J. Eckleburg. Michaelis says that it is only an advertisement when he sees George Wilson looking at the eyes of Eckleburg while he invokes God—“God sees everything.” Can we know what things are like in reality, beyond their appearances to us, in and of themselves? Kant would say ‘no,’ because the speculative mind can only know the ‘phenomenal’, but not the ‘noumenal’ world (Guyer & Wood 2000). Then it is not altogether impossible when George in his meditation tries to transcend the phenomenal world to locate Eckleburg in the noumenal world, identifying through association – Eckleburg as God, and himself as the moral agent who would deal out justice for his murdered wife.

During the Enlightenment, Hume’s philosophy negated much of the above metaphysical views—both Plato’s theory of forms and Descartes’ concept of mental substances. For Hume, a superior kind of knowledge would have totally been an illusion, but the recollection of Gatsby in the form of an analeptic narrative technique only emphasizes Hume’s notion that Gatsby is not a transcendental being, but merely an ‘idea’ along with the other characters. Hume divides perceptions into ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’ where ‘impressions’ are the immediate sensory impulses, emotions, passions, the information/data that is gathered from seeing, touching, hearing, etc., while ‘ideas’ are the faint reflections, copies of our impressions that occur when we recall, think, or remember any of our immediate impressions (Lavine 1984: 151-2). This solves much of the mystery behind Nick’s occasional forgetting of conversations and hearsays. Gatsby is an idea like the other characters in the text. Different ideas connect with each other through Hume’s three laws of – ‘resemblance’, ‘contiguity’ and ‘causality’ (Lavine 1984, 156-7). The recollection of the immediate impressions of Gatsby gives rise to the faint ideas of him, thus conjuring up through association all the faint ideas of Nick’s world — places, names, faces, features, and everything that emanate during the flux of recollection. Moreover, since our ideas reach no further than our experiences, we have no experience of divine attributes. For the same reason, no one knows what ‘reality’ or the noumenal world is. It is the world that is detached from and independent of our sense perceptions of it. George Wilson understands this when he says that he doesn’t belong to any church and that religion has no remedy and cannot provide stability for the tragic loss of his wife, Myrtle. He renounces the option of even seeking the consolation of the Scriptures or the Church, resorting instead to the only remedy of immediate impressions, offered to him by Tom.

In Chapter 7, Tom says—“I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife” (123). This upper-cased Mr Nobody that Tom refers to is Gatsby. By the way of referring Gatsby to a Nobody, Fitzgerald evokes the character of Odysseus in Homer’s The Odyssey. In Book 9, line 410 of The Odyssey, Odysseus introduces himself to the Cyclops as “Nobody”; “Nobody—that’s my name. Nobody—so my mother and father call me, all my friends” (Fagles 2006).

By way of this allusion, Gatsby is metamorphosed into a modern day Odysseus, a wealthy wanderer. The water bodies have been an essential part of his entire life like Odysseus; his past, present and future revolve around water. He travelled for five years with Dan Cody when “that yacht represented all beauty and glamour in the world”; he is separated from Daisy by the river; he shows an occasional yearning to ride all the way up to the shore of Sound with Nick on his hydroplane; and he dies too in his pool.

Odysseus and Gatsby share behavioral elements as well as temperamental traits. Adorno and Horkheimer reflect that in Odysseus, “the urge to rescue the past as something living, instead of using it as a material of progress, has been satisfied only in art, in which even history, as a representation of past life, is included” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 25). Gatsby tries to rescue the past, but fails, and is brutally killed. For the Enlightenment, what can be encompassed by unity has the status of existent; therefore, when Odysseus calls himself Nobody, Polyphemus like Tom considers him to be nonexistent, and therefore his identity and origin becomes a subject of suspicion. Nick observes that Tom has a “cruel body” in Chapter 1, an apt expression that makes him resemble Polyphemus. “For enlightenment, anything that does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 3). Therefore, Gatsby, who represents the allurement of getting lost in the past, at times is also a suspected “bootlegger.” Tom fails (unlike Nick) to see that Gatsby is not “Mr Nobody from Nowhere,” but Somebody from Himself (a Platonic conception of himself).

Gatsby is a concept, a myth like Odysseus, and the novel, like Homer’s, “as a whole bear[s] witness to the dialectic of enlightenment” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 35). Fitzgerald evokes the Dionysian and not the Homeric Apollonian Odysseus. Gatsby’s parties dissolve class distinction by stirring the primitive impulses of his guests like Bacchus who stimulated the primitive impulses of the citizens of Thebes to annihilate the house of Cadmus. Old Money (Tom and Daisy), New Money (Gatsby), and No Money (Nick) dissolve in
a hedonistic symposium of the cynics, the materialists, and the stoic/skeptic.

Free exchange of ideas and opinions during the Enlightenment took place in a salon, a club, or in a private house. In case of the less respectable, coffee houses and taverns were preferred. Locke himself was a founder of such a club called the ‘Dry Club’ in London (Brown 1996, 13). Salons, like country houses, enabled women to play a more prominent role in philosophical discussions. The exchange of ideas in the text, too, is located in the private houses of Daisy, Nick, and Gatsby, in the city apartments, clubs, and the garage. The guests at Gatsby’s party lose themselves through inebriation in the “euphoric suspension of the self” which is mediated between self-preservation and self-annihilation, and is “an attempt by the self to survive itself” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 26). The parties foreground the hedonistic attitude of the Twenties associated with the possession of wealth by a vast majority of the population. The suspension of the self and crossing the boundary of the self are laden with a promise of joy, which has threatened civilization at every moment. In the last chapter of the novel Nick observes that Tom and Daisy are “careless people”, who “smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money”, leaving other people to clean up the mess they had made (170).

V.

The Great Gatsby comes closest to the Age of Enlightenment through its central reference to Kant. Adorno and Horkheimer observe in Dialectic of Enlightenment that the project of Enlightenment was “the disenchantment of the world”—the eradication of animism, its regard for anthropomorphism has left no difference between “the totemic animal, the dreams of the spirit seer, and the absolute Idea” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002: 3).

April 22, 1924 was the worldwide celebration of Kant’s bicentennial birthday. Horst Kruse explicates in his paper “The Great Gatsby”: A View from Kant’s Window – Transatlantic Crosscurrents that the 1926 publication of the novel was Fitzgerald’s way of paying a deliberate tribute to the philosopher. Kant’s staring at the steeple of the Loebenicht parish church is a symbolic gesture of a metaphysical reflection, while Nick’s staring at Gatsby’s house is also a philosophical contemplation of time (Kruse, 2003). When Nick Beholds ‘Gatsby’s enormous house’ he speculates the previous owner’s high ambitions and his defluency to assert himself against Time. The image of the rise and fall of ‘clans’ and dynasties in the face of Time is triggered off by Gatsby’s house, which analogically is a church. This contemplation of time, right at the middle of the text in Chapter 5 has an intricate link with the narrative structure. Before Nick stares at Gatsby’s house, we get a mention of Gatsby tilting the “defunct mantelpiece clock”, which is a symbolic desire to restore the past. His meticulous reply to Daisy, that they are meeting after four years and eleven months foreground vividly that numbers are the essence of his life, and that he is indeed “an over wound clock” who is trying to settle down in the present by planning ahead for the future and is trying to capture the past. This unequivocally makes him a reductive materialist who reduces the features of his world to a physical base. The origin of his wealth, and his formative years with Dan Cody is reduced to a symbol of the ‘hydroplane’. His identity as a soldier is reduced to a medal that says “Major Jay Gatsby—For Valour Extraordinary” (65); his desire for Daisy is reduced to the ‘green light’; and his involvement in criminal activities to the finest “specimens of human molars” on the cuff buttons of Meyer Wolfshiem.

I have therefore previously called him an idealist, as one who needs material wealth to live an ideal life and to retrieve Daisy. This atomistic view of experience began with Locke and the empiricists as the theory of associationism (Lavine 1984: 155). The empiricists believed that the atoms of experience, sensations and impressions are connected, Hume described this in the three laws of ‘resemblance,’ ‘contiguity,’ and ‘cause and effect’ (Lavine 1984, 156).

What follows in the text after the contemplation on Time is Nick’s thirtieth birthday, the beginning of the inevitable dissociation with the other characters after the death of Gatsby, the decade of his ‘thinning’ associations, and the eventually ceaseless excursion on “boats against the current…into the past” (172). By invoking this metaphysical reflection on Time and Space, Fitzgerald introduces the Kantian concept of time and space, the pure forms of all intuitions contributed by our own sensory faculties and therefore are forms of which we have an a priori knowledge (Gayer & Wood 2000). Nick and Gatsby are able to cognize time, space, and spatiotemporality of the experienced objects. Not as they ‘are in themselves’ (‘nous’, or ‘reality’), but only as things appear under the conditions of their sensibility. Therefore, this sudden contemplation on time solves much of the thematic and structural problems of the text. By evoking the reference to this empirically real, but transcendentally ideal time and space, Nick realizes the inexorable romantic futility of Gatsby’s quest—the “following of the grill” (142).

Kant believed that deterministic laws governed the phenomenal world, similar to Hume’s conception of the animal instinct (Lavine, 1984), which anticipates the outcome based on experiences. Therefore, Kant notices that since our minds organize the world for our experience, we know that we will experience the same outcomes, as before. The future will resemble the past.
Therefore, in Chapter 6, when Nick tries to warn Gatsby against his doom by saying “You can’t repeat the past,” Gatsby contradicts and claims the opposite, “of course you can.”

**CONCLUSION:**
The *Great Gatsby* bears witness to the Enlightenment’s ideals and legacies. The Enlightenment also becomes the historical point of origin and intellectual foundation of the American civilization as Zafirovski points out. Thus, in the course of the paper I have endeavoured to locate the novel within the broad spectrum of Enlightenment project. The numerous references to this one single epoch in the novel forms the skeletal of the specific underlying philosophical standpoint of Fitzgerald that is disseminated throughout his literary creations. Therefore we observe that Nick in his effort to recollect his memories of Gatsby, conjures up a plethora of philosophical viewpoints, references, analogies, and allusions strongly pertaining to the Age of Enlightenment. Therefore, the secret, the “Great”-ness, and the nebulous reality of Gatsby are fathomed by journeying within the heart of Enlightenment philosophy through which Nick also acquires clarity, liberation, and “maturity.”

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