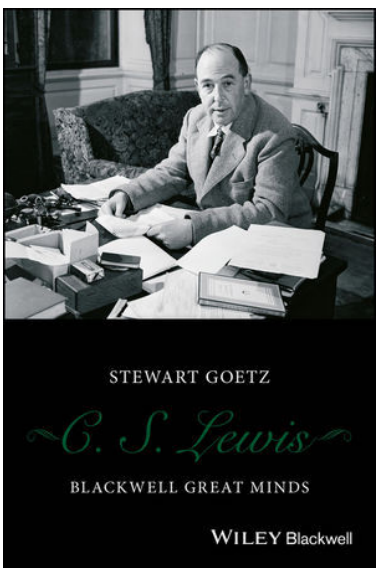
Book Reviews

Stewart Goetz. *C.S. Lewis*. (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley, 2018).

Stewart Goetz's *C.S. Lewis*, a recent volume in the Blackwell Great Minds series, offers a compelling account of Lewis the philosopher. As those familiar with Lewis's writings know, Lewis's philosophical positions appear throughout his vast corpus, but Goetz organizes them logically and presents them clearly, enabling the reader to better appreciate the coherence of Lewis's thought. The book will certainly appeal to Lewis experts, but it is also accessible to a broader audience, replete with helpful summaries and rich quotations by Lewis himself. I was particularly impressed by Goetz's ability to anticipate my questions as a reader, and I appreciated Goetz's forthrightness about those times when Lewis's views on a topic are not entirely clear (182, 192).



One of the book's key themes is Lewis's commitment to reason: Goetz's Lewis is, first and (in some ways) foremost, a rationalist. Chapter two explores this topic in detail, but it is foundational for much of what follows. On a related note, the book focuses on Lewis's critique of naturalism. For Lewis, naturalism's account of human thought won't do, as it renders human reasoning as nothing more than a material phenomenon (32-34). In fact, Lewis thinks of human reasoning as *miraculous*: all of our thoughts, however minute, involve "supernational causation," the orchestration of the physical body by the reasoning soul (136). And Lewis contends that these crossings of the threshold between soul and body, between the supernatural and the natural, shed light on what he referred to as the "Grand Miracle"—the Incarnation (143-46). As Goetz helpfully explains, Lewis believes "we can understand the Incarnation because we already understand that human beings are soul-body composites, where the soul is a supernatural entity that is able to engage in 'the act of reasoning'" (144). Our ability to reason lays the groundwork for understanding the coming of Jesus Christ.

While Goetz's account of Lewis's conception of reason is clear and insightful, I found the book's discussion of presuppositionalism somewhat puzzling. In the book's introduction, Goetz challenges evangelical Chris-

tians' appropriation of Lewis, claiming that, unlike many (often American) evangelicals, Lewis was not a presuppositionalist. Goetz defines presuppositionalism as

> the view that one's ability to know is impaired (often explained in terms of the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden) and, because it is, to avoid error one must have in place certain intellectual commitments before one can know. For many evangelicals, one must rely on what they think of as Christian or biblical presuppositions (regularly referred to as the biblical or Christian worldview, or what God has willed or said as revealed in the Bible) to support one's foundational claims to know and to have reasoned well. (5)

At the Christian college where I teach, Lewis is indeed an unofficial "patron saint"of ours: the Marion E. Wade Center, which publishes this journal, is a wonderful archive of Lewis-related materials, and Lewis is required reading for our freshmen. Based on my experience, I don't think Goetz is incorrect when he claims that evangelicals sometimes "mistakenly portray Lewis as one of their own" (5). (I'm confident that I have done so myself.) However, several questions arose for me as I read Goetz's reflections on presuppositionalism.

For one thing, it is not entirely clear to me why Goetz presents presuppositionalism exclusively in relation to evangelicalism. That the mind is fallible and that understanding must be predicated upon faith commitments (expressed by St. Anselm's phrase *credo ut intelligam*) are ideas of the Christian intellectual tradition that long predate the modern evangelical movement. It might have been productive to bring Lewis's views about rationality into conversation with this much older tradition to a greater extent.

What is more, when Goetz warns (in one of the book's memorable lines) that "we should be careful not to presuppose that Lewis was a presuppositionalist," I found myself asking whether it is actually possible not to be one (6). As the theologian and missiologist Lesslie Newbigin persuasively argues in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, "There is no knowing without believing" (33). Even if one concedes that Lewis didn't reason from biblical presuppositions, surely Lewis's foundational commitment to reason makes him a kind of presuppositionalist as well. Several of Goetz's remarks about Lewis's view of reason—"he believed one could not put much stock in anything else without first putting it in reasoning" (30); "one must simply acknowledge that we reason, and any view of reality that implies that we do not reason is indefensible and unacceptable from the get-go" (31); and "we cannot reason against reason. . . . '[r]eason is our starting point'" (41)—seem to present us with a form of presuppositionalism.

Part of me also wonders about the extent to which Lewis's attempts to ground his defenses of Christianity on reason stem not only from his commitment to rationalism but also from his keen awareness about the needs of his audience. When addressing non-Christians, Lewis's choice to begin with reason may have been as much an expression of his rhetorical goodwill as it was a reflection of his philosophical commitments.

Be that as it may, Goetz has made another valuable contribution to Lewis scholarship through this intellectually engaging book. He has succeeded in demonstrating that we must add *philosopher* to the many hats worn by C.S. Lewis.

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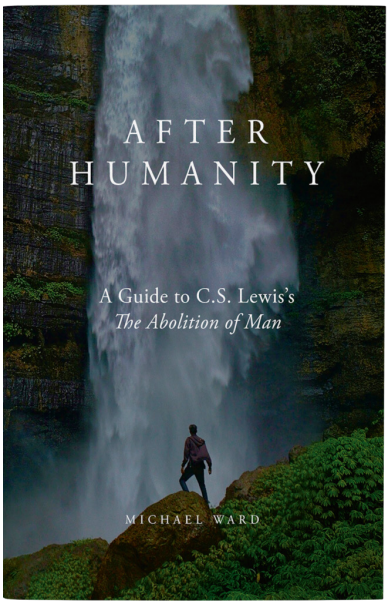
Michael Ward, *After Humanity: A Guide to C.S. Lewis's* The Abolition of Man. (Park Ridge, Illinois: Word on Fire Academic, 2021).



Aside from The Chronicles of Narnia, the two C.S. Lewis books I read as a teenager were *Mere Christianity* and *The Screwtape Letters*. Both opened my eyes to the way language has been increasingly manipulated since the Enlightenment. The preface to *Mere Christianity* explained how words had become disconnected from any fixed, objective, transcendent meaning (or signifier), leaving them to be determined instead by the prevailing mood of society or the emotional state of the individual using them. The first of *The Screwtape Letters* revealed how humans had been steered away from judging actions as good or evil and had focused their attention, instead, on whether those actions were idealistic or practical, conservative or liberal, old-fashioned or progressive, close-minded or free-thinking.

It wasn't until I began my career as an English professor and read Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* that I learned the technical word for this linguistic shift: