

Book Reviews

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***The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis on Science, Scientism and Society.* Edited by John G. West. (Seattle, WA: Discovery Institute Press, 2012). \$22.55 (paperback), 350 pp.**

Reviewing edited collections present their special challenges. In this one, there is a fair amount of redundancy—authors making the same points, quoting the same paragraphs of Lewis, repeating the same arguments. There is unevenness in the quality of the contributions. As well, it is rather grating to read the heavily gendered language of the authors (e.g., “Man” instead of “humans” or “humanity”).

On the one hand, Lewis’s fans will resonate with the criticisms of materialism and scientism discussed in this book. In all his writings discussing or touching on evolution, Lewis never rejected descent with modification—the idea that all living creatures descend from common ancestors in the past leading perhaps to a small number of (or even one) “starter species” in the remote past. Nevertheless, he did reject all naturalist/materialist interpretations of evolution, often critiquing naturalistic materialism and scientism masquerading as science.

On the other hand, practically all the essays in this collection are deeply flawed with one important exception, John Collins’s essay, “A Peculiar Clarity.” It is both the best in the collection and serves in many ways as a corrective to the rest of the book. His theme is Lewis’s aim for clarity of thought and expression. By contrast, most of the essays in the book are muddled and clearly have an agenda that Lewis didn’t share: undermining evolutionary sciences in favor of Intelligent Design [ID]. However, the evidential basis for evolution is so substantial that the credulity of the volume becomes rather obvious.

In his essay Collins addresses some of the same Lewis quotations as the other essays but with an interpretation far less radical and far less congenial to ID’s anti-science attacks. Indeed, Collins makes all the valuable points in this collection. For instance, he discusses Lewis’s warnings about the limitations of scientific discoveries for either Christian or atheist apologetics (77-78). This discussion is high irony for a volume in service of ID, a view that attempts a scientific apologetics against atheism.

The rest of the contributions in the volume can be characterized by focusing on John G. West’s essay, “Darwin in the Dock.” West’s definition of Darwinism is clearly different from Lewis’s, as becomes apparent in his

discussion of Lewis and theistic evolution (a term West never defines but uses as a foil for Christians denying biblical authority or an actual Fall).

West has an axe to grind. For instance, West refers to the thesis of common descent as “hallowed dogma” held with “quasi-religious fervor” (113), yet ignores the fact that scientists believe in common descent because of the overwhelming evidential support it has in the fossil and genetic records. West relies on the trope that evolution can only be materialist-naturalist ideology—Darwinism essentially for West—rather than taking seriously the scientific conclusion that has been carefully arrived at based on evidence and rechecked for well over a century (a trope Lewis never trafficked in). And he is quite happy to take Lewis’s remarks about naturalistic metaphysics masquerading as “science” and reinterpret them as skeptical critiques of evolution, committing the fallacy of ambiguity: equating evolutionary science with Darwinism. Lewis never made the mistakes West does in his chapter (mistakes permeating most of the other contributions).

Based on this classic logical fallacy, West proceeds to discuss Lewis’s “exceptions” to evolution. Lewis’s first supposed “exception to human evolution was his insistence on an actual Fall of Man from an original state of innocence” (115). But as Lewis was aware, a biological theory says nothing about a historical Fall one way or the other. West’s materialist-naturalist foil might carry an implication of no historical Fall but the theory of evolution lacks such implications. Lewis knew this was metaphysical add-on, but West ignores this. In the process, West confuses original innocence with moral perfection (moral perfection is not in the semantic range of the Hebrew *tob*, translated as “good,” in Genesis 1): Another fallacy of ambiguity is deployed on top of the earlier Darwinism-evolution ambiguity.

There are similar logical fallacies in West’s discussion of a historical Adam and Eve (Lewis’s supposed second exception to evolution, even though biological theory can not rule out a historical Adam and Eve). Lewis’s supposed third exception to evolution is a rejection of “mindless material” processes producing human beings: however, once again, nothing in evolutionary science implies processes have to be “mindless” (another metaphysical add-on Lewis recognized).

Even West’s highly selective list of “theistic evolutionists” creates a false impression. I know of no Christians who take seriously the idea that our triune Creator might be working in and through evolutionary processes who agree theologically with West’s “leading theistic evolutionists.” What we have here is the fallacy of privileged cynicism: Adopt the most cynical motivation or reason or the worst example to tarnish the view you oppose rather than looking at the actual arguments or the best exemplars of that view.

Perhaps the most contentious part of West’s chapter is his discussion of Lewis’s attitude towards natural selection. Lewis often argued that natural

processes on their own could not achieve the rationality or consciousness characteristic of humanity. Nevertheless, the theory of evolution never says God is not involved in the very processes of life and its diversity (one needs materialist naturalism as add-on to get that conclusion, a point Lewis was clear about).

When West turns to Lewis's thought on natural selection's creative power, it is important to note two other fallacies. One is a fallacy about randomness at work in West's discussion. He treats randomness as lawless chaos, but no scientist believes that randomness is lawless chaos. Randomness, or chance, are forms of order that conform to statistical laws. West and his ID colleagues always assume lawless chaos instead of the scientific conception (Lewis sometimes also falls into this ambiguity).

The other is the personal exemption fallacy: Casting a very critical eye towards the views and arguments of your opponents while not practicing the same kind of rigorous critical sifting of your own views and arguments. Combined with the privileged cynicism fallacy—West only considers the most skeptical opinions that support his view—this leads him to not genuinely consider what Lewis was saying about natural selection and to be completely dismissive of the creative powers of God's good creation. It never dawns on West that Lewis may have underestimated the creative powers of the creation because he was mistaken about how natural selection and variations work.

The central problem with the book is that most of the essays use Lewis as a foil: argue that scientific orthodoxy about evidence and a biological theory somehow run afoul of theological orthodoxy (scientific theories and evidence don't say anything about theological orthodoxy), and bash Christians who take a different view than ID (scientific theories are not inconsistent with a triune God's intimate ongoing involvement in creation).

This is one of the most anti-science books I have read in a long time. It is a thinly disguised attempt to debunk contemporary evolutionary sciences and scientific methodology and replace them with ID. The authors—with the exception of Collins—often confuse science with scientism leading them to cast a skeptical pall on scientists. For example, Edward Larson's essay title, "C.S. Lewis on Science as a Threat to Freedom" (53) can only make sense if scientism replaces science. Lewis would have pointed that problem out.

West urges readers to "Consider this book an invitation to think more deeply about the growing power of science in the public square by drawing on the timeless wisdom of C.S. Lewis" (13). Ironically, even when this volume was published in 2012 the public square was turning its back on the sciences (witness the rejection of climate science and evolutionary sciences by so many US citizens and politicians as well as the dangerous spread of anti-vaxxer ideology). Indeed, the biggest irony of all is that ID itself stands

as a rejection of the sciences and scientific methods. This is something Lewis never would have endorsed.

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