

The Magician's Twin: C. S. Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Society
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In 2012, the Discovery Institute, the center of the Intelligent Design movement, released the book *The Magician's Twin*, edited by John G. West, a senior Fellow of the Institute and one of the editors of the highly-regarded *C. S. Lewis Readers' Encyclopedia*. *The Magician's Twin* addresses, and challenges, the claim that the works of C. S. Lewis are a friend to Darwinian evolution. While not addressing the question of the age of the earth, this book contains many powerful chapters that point out the dangers and implications of the theory of evolution, and it refutes the idea that Lewis endorsed the full range of evolutionary theory. The three chapters by John West especially address the legacy of Lewis and are among the most helpful chapters.

Since the name of Lewis appears in the subtitle of the book, let's look first at what John West and others say about him. Chapter 6, "Darwin in the Dock," contains the most important review of Lewis's position on evolution. While not a young earth creationist, Lewis offered strong criticism of evolutionary theory.

Here are the fundamental positions taken by Lewis: (1) Lewis believed in the common descent of all human beings from one ancestor. (2) Lewis believed in the fall into sin as an event in history, including a literal Adam and Eve. (3) Lewis believed God worked the miracle that made Adam and Eve. (4) Chance and necessity produce nothing, and natural selection has its limitations. (5) Reason, beauty, and morality cannot be explained by a blind material process. For example, in "The Funeral of a Great Myth," Lewis found it unbelievable that the theory of evolution "asks me to believe that reason is simply the unforeseen and unintended byproduct of a mindless process at one stage of its endless and aimless becoming" (54f.). (6) Evolutionists are growing in their dogmatism and intolerance. (7) The mass media have created a popular scientism. (8) The current paradigm discourages scientists from asking the questions that would elicit evidence for function and design.

Where many would part company with Lewis is in his letter to a critic of evolution, "I believe that Christianity can still be believed, even if Evolution is true." While that is technically true, it grants more credence to evolution than it deserves. The evolutionary position runs counter to many of the straightforward statements of the Bible, including the testimony of Jesus. But Lewis also wrote, "I don't mind whether God made man out of earth or whether 'earth' merely means 'previous millennia of ancestral organisms.' If the fossils make it probable that man's physical ancestors 'evolved,' no matter" (113). Lewis adopted a largely biblical position, but one with some significant compromises with Darwinism. And he apparently did not know much about the fossil record, which points to a sudden appearance of life rather than a gradual one.

Lewis pointed out in his book *Miracles* that the birth of modern science stemmed from the Judeo-Christian view of God as creator, which correlated with belief in the regularity of nature, while also warning that "biology after Darwin provided potent fuel for turning science into a secular religion" (31). Lewis feared that many ideological and pseudo-scientific proposals would be set forth in the name of science, and his prediction has proved true. Among the proposals mentioned (but rejected) in *The Magician's Twin* are for an end to democracy, the reduction of earth's population by up to 90%, coercive government measures to control our diets, and the damaging of religious rights (37).

The phrase "the magician's twin" comes from Lewis himself. As John West points out, "the comparison between science and magic runs throughout a number of his works" (19),

the two ideas of science and magic being similar in that they are able to function as an alternative religion, in their encouragement of a lack of skepticism, and in their quest for power.

The book is divided into four sections: Science & Scientism, Origins, Reason, and Society. Most prominently mentioned in this book are two of Lewis' works, *The Abolition of Man* (Lewis's defense of an objective standard of right and wrong with his predictions of where humankind is heading) and *That Hideous Strength*, the latter being the novelistic embodiment of the content of *The Abolition of Man*. In *That Hideous Strength*, for example, Lewis stated that the distortion of the physical sciences can have a negative result: "Despair of objective truth had been increasingly insinuated into the scientists; indifference to it, and a concentration upon mere power, had been the result" (56f.).

In John Collins' chapter in Part One, the sheer Darwinian perspective which sees us "as living systems" that are "nothing more than a bag of chemicals" is shown by Lewis to undercut anyone's right to believe such a claim (95). If we are "nothing more than a bag of chemicals," Lewis suggests, how is it that a "bag of chemicals" is able to think such lofty, rational, and moral thoughts? Lewis develops this argument in his 1947 *Miracles*, so much so that the book can be described as not only a defense of the biblical account of miracles, but also a defense of the intelligent design of human beings. In addition, however, Lewis develops these ideas elsewhere. In his essay "Is Theology Poetry?," Lewis writes "We love to notice that the express [train] engine of today is the descendant of the 'Rocket'; we do not equally remember that the 'Rocket' springs not from some even more rudimentary engine, but from something much more perfect and complicated than itself—namely, a man of genius" (156). In that same chapter, West refutes Michael Peterson's claim that none of the arguments of Lewis are "really design-type arguments" (157-173), in part, because he misrepresents the modern theory of intelligent design.

John West's chapter in Part Two, Origins, plays off the title of one of Lewis's essays, which entitled "God in the Dock." West's article, "Darwin in the Dock," puts Darwin on trial, using the quotation that many have seen on the Internet: "It will be a comfort to me all my life to know that the scientist and the materialist have not the last word: that Darwin and Spencer undermining ancestral beliefs stand themselves on a foundation of sand; of gigantic assumptions and irreconcilable contradictions an inch below the surface" (109f). He challenges Francis Collins, Kenton Sparks, and other theistic evolutionists, who, in turn, have challenged the authority of Scripture, the historicity of the Fall, or even the idea of divine direction in the evolutionary process (110). However, as West also points out, Lewis also adopted some positions that have since been discredited, such as the idea that our evolutionary development is recapitulated in the womb (114). Other references to the library of Lewis provide indications of his belief that an unfallen world (prior to Genesis 3) is incompatible with evolution (116-120).

Furthermore, writes West, Lewis was "appalled by the growing dogmatism and intolerance he saw among evolutionists" (138), something which we continue to see in our day. Lewis also argued correctly that the idea of developmentalism, an idea inherent in evolution, originated before the theory and then the theory followed (142). Therefore, evolutionary theory did not originate with Darwin, but started much earlier, which allowed Darwin's views easy acceptance.

There is much more to commend this book, particularly in Section Four of the book on Society. The description of Transhumanism, or the human enhancement movement, centered especially in Oxford, England, shows Lewis's predictions in *The Abolition of Man* to be frighteningly accurate, as technology advances rapidly while our moral knowledge declines (see especially Chapter 10, "C. S. Lewis and the Advent of the Posthuman," by James A Herrick).

One of the things not described in this book is the university setting in which Lewis taught. At Oxford University, Lewis would only have come in contact with people who were committed to a Darwinian view of science. Many believe that, had Lewis had more contact with young earth creationists, as he did with Bernard Acworth¹ in the 1950s, he might well have adopted that position, or at least distanced himself further from the old earth position.

With the exception of Lewis' adoption of biological evolution and the common descent of man (and the realization that the book does not address the age of the earth), I heartily recommend the book. Reading this book will correct the record and successfully dispel the myth that C. S. Lewis is a friend to Darwinian evolution.

¹ Lewis first wrote to Acworth in September 1951 and last in March 1960. Capt. Bernard Acworth (1885-1963), who was the Founder and President Emeritus of the Evolution Protest Movement, served for eighteen years in submarines and commanded the Anti-Submarine Flotilla.