

THE JOURNAL OF INKLINGS STUDIES

John G. West (ed.), *The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Society.*

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The Journal of Inklings Studies Vol. 4, No. 1, date 2014

The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Society. Edited by John G. West. Seattle, Washington: Discovery Institute Press, 2012. 347pp. ISBN 9781936599059.

The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis on Science, Scientism, and Society is an essay collection that seeks to paint a less familiar picture of C.S. Lewis. His popular readers, familiar with his fiction in their childhood and his apologetics in their maturity, tend to envision him similar to his own Professor Kirke, an endearing yet mysterious, pipe-toting, elder uncle sort of figure, full of wisdom and stories. As true or not true as this may be, John G. West has selected essays that depict C.S. Lewis as a Jeremiah figure, a vociferous prophet trying to alert his time to an impending collapse, an end already beginning. The Jerusalem of Humanity is on the brink of destruction by the already present Babylon of relativism and naturalism. Lewis saw this end coming in the naturalism that underlies modern science and the subjectivism and scientism that results. He saw that science had come to master nature and empower men in increasingly unrestricted ways, and that if left unchecked by reason, scientism proved a threat to human freedom, and even to human nature itself. Every essay defends the point that Lewis himself could never fully put to rest: that Lewis is not anti-science, he is anti-scientism, defined as the 'wrong-headed belief that modern science supplies the only reliable method of knowledge about the world, and its corollary that scientists have the right to dictate a society's morals, religious beliefs, and even government policies merely because of their scientific expertise.'¹

This claim, this prophecy by Lewis is best and powerfully introduced in the first essay by the editor, West, himself, 'Lewis spent World War II writing not about the dangers of Nazism or communism, but about the dangers of scientism and its effort to abolish man.'² Lewis saw these palpable evils as offspring from the more insidious force of scientism. The whole book is framed by Lewis' deep apprehension and foreboding over the naturalism and reductivism of his time, and seeks to

¹ West, *Magician's*, 12

² *Ibid.*

explain, justify, and modernize his claims. The collection convincingly pursues this end, systematically working thorough the different areas of Lewis' thoughts on science and its relation to society, and relating them to the world in the 21st century. The essays are ordered in a way that promotes a proper understanding of Lewis, not as an anti-science Luddite, but as a philosopher with an indispensable diagnosis about the state and direction of human nature.

The first section, Science and Scientism, introduces Lewis' thought on science and how he goes about justifying his claims. The opening essay frames science in relation to power, society, and culture, and sets the stage for Lewis' argument. The second and third essays argue science's inadequacies as the sole font of knowledge and the consequential threat that scientism can be to freedom, respectively. These express the basic claim of Lewis and outline his positions. The next two essays are about Lewis' method. Jake Atkins makes a powerful and compelling case for the value of Lewis' Medieval background. One begins skeptical but by the end is ready to grant that an understanding and expertise in medieval thought gives Lewis a massive and unappreciated insight into the nature of science from its infancy. C. John Collins then explores Lewis' mastery of language in what is a valuable contribution to the whole of the book, but in itself, should have been trimmed down at least by a few pages. The essay garrulously lost track of its purpose and wandered into discursive and unnecessary depths not valuable to its overall frame. It was necessary to return and re-read the first paragraph half way through because the point and goal of the paper was had been forgotten.

The second section, completely authored by West, speaks to Lewis' understanding of and opinion on evolution and Intelligent Design. 'Darwin in the Dock' is lengthy and broad, but not unnecessarily so. West covers swaths of information about Lewis' evolutionary thought, and the understanding he gives powerfully expresses and reinforces Lewis' view of the relationship between man and nature, reason and faith. The evolutionary idea is so basic and so formative to the modern mind that it warrants the time and space given to it in such a collection, and the energy that Lewis himself put into arguing that evolutionary thought could not come to govern science and culture lest it annihilate our value of the human person and cripple the scientific enterprise though dogmatism. The essay on Intelligent Design is appropriate and timely, but somewhat of an aside in the book as a whole. Amongst essays all about attacking scientism and naturalism, the seventh is a kind of defense of an idea, Intelligent Design. It is well written and stoutly defends against evolutionary criticism, but it stands out in the way that it strays from the theme of warning and caution against scientism.

The third section focuses on Lewis' foundational argument from Reason. This is the heart of the reasoned philosophical criticism of scientism. Talking about the decline of morality and the societal repercussions of unchecked scientific enterprise would be giving an argument solely from consequence. By having Reppert masterfully recount and expound upon Lewis' book *Miracles* and the argument from reason in all of its intricacies, West establishes that Lewis has sound and convincing reasons for the warnings that he gives. 'C.S. Lewis' Dangerous Idea Revisited' is one of the most compelling essays in this collection because it systematically fleshes out the strong, reasonable underpinnings of the whole of the criticism of scientism. The essay derives its name from Reppert's book *C.S. Lewis' Dangerous Idea* and is largely a boiling down and recounting of that book's thesis. It serves not to go beyond the full book, but to reiterate the heart of it. By exposing the naturalistic metaphysics and methodology of science as rationally untenable, Lewis brings the whole of science back into the arena of criticism and enables the entire enterprise of reevaluating scientism, the heart of this book. Part of what makes this essay so good and so effective is that it is not merely a regurgitation or a report of *Miracles*, instead, Reppert modifies, modernizes, and informs the argument to benefit and empower the modern reader by responding to modern objections that Lewis himself did not have to contend with.

The final section of the book tells you what everything before it really means. This is the heart of the prophecy. West has led the reader through Lewis' understanding and criticism of evolutionary thought, naturalism, scientism, subjectivism, and relativism. Now he applies those criticisms to society and demonstrates the ways that Lewis' warning is already coming true and the consequences of compliance. It would be far too easy, at this point, for the book to devolve into sensationalist warnings from self-condemned Cassandras, but each essay does a remarkably good job of making the necessary assertions to which Lewis was so wholeheartedly, and remaining grounded in the appropriate, palatable tone, necessary for the raising of one's awareness to these problems to be in any way efficacious. The last essay, 'C.S. Lewis, Scientism, and the Moral Imagination' by Michael Matheson Miller was far and beyond the favourite of the collection. It serves as a summary of the whole collection without being redundant, offering new angles and facets to ideas previously presented. It also has the defining role of prescribing a response to all of the trends about which the reader is now aware and concerned. It gives concrete descriptions of how one ought to combat scientism to try to revert the trends that risk driving mankind into the dire, foreseen consequences. Without this last essay, the whole book would just be a depressing argument convincing the reader that mankind already comfortably occupied the handbasket to hell; this essay solicits

action and reform, focused around education. It is no small coincidence that *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis' fullest defense of natural law and human nature, and a focal point of this entire book, is framed as a commentary on education. It is from education that the problems herein addressed arose, and in education that the problems herein addressed will be solved. The emphasis on children's literature and instruction is appropriate and necessary because it is the new generations that will be able to escape from the indoctrination of subjectivism and naturalism in favor of the naturally evident and rational systems of objective value and morality.

The Magician's Twin is an essay collection that efficaciously promotes and defends Lewis' criticisms of Scientism and warnings about its consequences. Some of its essays need trimming, particularly in the area of background information. It is understood that as an essay each part needs to be able to stand alone, but as a part of a whole, each part need not explain the thesis of the *Abolition of Man* ad nauseam. The contiguity provided by many of the essays focusing in on the *Abolition of Man* and *That Hideous Strength* is of great benefit to the reader and to the book as a whole, but there are definite redundancies when moving through the collection as a whole. A few of the authors, sensitive to this reality, invite the readers to skip entire subsections of the essay if they are previously familiar with this or that work. It was a welcome feature, but makes one all the more aware that there were some arguments that had been enumerated three or four times. However, aside from this small complaint to some degree inescapable in a work of this kind, this was an excellent collection. Its power comes from its organization and its conclusion. The individual articles are strong on their own merits, but as part of a whole they form a coherent unit that formidably criticizes scientism and prescribes cultural action to resist and make reason inhere once again not only in abstract discourse but in day-to-day life. It is the message of a hopeful prophet who seeks to raise Man's collective conscience out of the stupor of his indoctrination to organize a resistance and restore reason for generations to come.

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