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viable responses to the one transcendent, divine Reality.

C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion, by **John Beversluis**. Grand Rapids: William R. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985. Pp. XIV + 182. \$9.95 (paper).

THOMAS V. MORRIS, University of Notre Dame.

Not many good philosophers are great writers. Not many good writers are great philosophers. But an exceptional writer who addresses philosophical and religious topics with verve and style, whose books are well marketed, and who succeeds in touching people's lives can on occasion be acclaimed a great philosopher by the appreciative reading public who have benefited from his writing, a judgment which may sometimes be far out of line with the properly philosophical merits of his thought.

Some professional philosophers find themselves with an ambivalent attitude toward such an author's success. While grateful for whatever good he has managed to effect in the lives of his readers, they regret the confusion of rhetoric with philosophy pervading the public reception of his work. Other professional philosophers find themselves hardly ambivalent at all, but are just irked at the situation. Having worked hard at philosophy for years, having come to understand the difficulty of ever proving anything by pure reason alone, and having reconciled themselves to living with the uncertainties of this world, they are more than a little irritated to see their students and the general reading public idolizing some good writer as a great philosopher who has proved this, that, and everything else of real philosophical significance, when it is clear to a trained eye that no such results have been attained at all. The tone of his book indicates that this is precisely how John Beversluis perceives and reacts to the phenomenon of C. S. Lewis' extraordinary popularity as a Christian apologist and writer.

This book actually begins with a measured, judicious, even appreciative tone of presentation. But it soon changes into a somewhat shrill, harsh, strident assault which ends up portraying Lewis as something of a pathetic figure whose blustery posturing as a rational apologist for Christian truth finally gave way at the end of his life to a desperate faith-against-all-odds held onto only by means of blatant philosophical inconsistency. Beversluis is concerned to blow the whistle on the Lewis myth, and as a professional guardian of philosophical truth, to protect the general public from Lewis' egregious logical errors. He says this of the Lewis reading public:

The people to whom he primarily addresses himself are not trained in

philosophy; they are on the whole simply not in a position to recognize his distortions, omissions, and oversimplifications. (89)

It is Beversluis' aim to put his readers into a position where they can see Lewis' failures. In representative passages, he characterizes Lewis' "irresponsible writing" (40) as exhibiting "a persistent tendency toward carelessness, inaccuracy, and oversimplification whenever he discusses opposing views" (42), and blasts Lewis' own positive positions and arguments with such epithets as 'confused,' 'wrongheaded,' 'shipwrecked,' 'disgraced,' 'considerably worse than fuzzy,' 'tendentious,' and 'desperate.' Colorful passages in Lewis are labelled as 'belligerent outbursts,' and we find that Lewis doesn't just *state* his opinions on controversial matters, he "gives vent" to them. The overall tone should be evident.

Beversluis' method is to isolate individual apologetic arguments in Lewis' writings and, taking his statements at face value, to employ the sorts of distinctions we introduce to first semester philosophy students to show those arguments to be unsound. Often we find the sort of barrage of questions leveled at one of Lewis' arguments which a tutor will sometimes direct at a careless student. The net assessment is that none of Lewis' reasons for believing there is a God is any good, and that in addition he has no good response to the most popular argument for believing there is no God, the problem of evil.

My main overall philosophical criticism of this book is that Beversluis seldom comes anywhere near to digging deep enough to really appreciate a line of thought suggested by Lewis. All too often he gives a facile, fairly superficial reconstruction of a line of argument, and after subjecting it to some critical questioning, declares it bankrupt and moves on. What is so disappointing to the reader who *is* trained in philosophy is that in most such instances a few minutes of reflective thought suffice to see that there are very interesting considerations to be marshalled in the direction Lewis was heading, considerations altogether neglected by the author. There are far too many false alternatives posed for Lewis' arguments, and hasty judgments rendered about their soundness. In short, it seems that Beversluis is guilty of precisely those shortcomings in polemical discussion he attributes to Lewis.

Some of the main lines of thought Lewis produced as indicating the truth of a theistic worldview, Beversluis treats as deductive arguments meant to prove the proposition that there is a God. This in itself is, I think, a mistake. As is well known nowadays, a philosophical argument can have force without being a deductive proof. But even more damaging to the prospects of a fair assessment of Lewis are Beversluis' oversights concerning the ways in which the details of the arguments themselves could be defended. In some places, for example, Lewis seems to suggest that human beings have a deep longing or desire which can be determined to be a desire for the divine, or for God. It cannot be satisfied by

any worldly object and is such that its very existence is a pointer to the reality of its proper object, an eternal divine being. Such arguments occur elsewhere in philosophy: We have an innate desire for everlasting life; innate desires are usually in principle satisfiable, and so their existence points to the existence of their proper object; so, probably, there is such a thing as everlasting life. Regardless of what we think of such arguments at first glance, sophisticated versions of them are possible which employ the basic apparatus of confirmation theory, and which deserve a careful hearing. Beversluis just states concerning any such desire, apparently, that "The desire in and of itself proves nothing, points to nothing," (19) as if that were all that needs to be said.

Further, Beversluis argues that if C. S. Lewis' own deepest desire had been for God, he would not, according to his own testimony, have been a reluctant convert. Likewise, if we all had a deep desire for God we would recognize it as such. We don't, so there is no such desire. But of course, God could be the cause and the only proper, complete satisfaction of the deepest need in the human heart without its being the case at all that he must be immediately recognizable as such by any person in just any spiritual or moral condition whatsoever. It is hard to see how Beversluis could ignore this possibility. But then, in another context, Beversluis characterizes the claim that a person's whole condition (attitudes, emotions, etc.) is relevant to what he can see in religious matters as a claim that seems "to imply that in the pursuit of truth it is not so much solid arguments as sunny dispositions that are decisive" (52). So perhaps his neglect of this possibility is not so surprising after all.

C. S. Lewis, of course, was not just a theist, he was a Christian. And one of his best known arguments was an argument for the divinity of Christ. Sometimes known as the Lewis Trilemma, Beversluis discusses it only as a dilemma. It goes something like this: Even non-Christians recognize Jesus as a great moral teacher. But he claimed to be God. So either he was a colossal liar, which is inconsistent with the assessment of him as a great moral force, or he really believed in his own deity, in which case he was either a lunatic on the level of a man, Lewis says, who believes he is a poached egg—a state also grossly incompatible with his moral leadership—or he was and is God, the Lord of Creation. Liar, Lunatic, or Lord—which was he? A positive assessment of his other teachings forces one to a positive assessment of his apparent self-understanding. Such is the argument, roughly put.

When disagreeing with assumptions Lewis makes here about the general reliability of the New Testament text, assumptions shared by many contemporary scholars of a traditional bent, Beversluis gratuitously states that "he is a textually careless and theologically unreliable guide" (54). But textual issues aside, Beversluis argues that even if Jesus *did* claim to be God, the only alternative to his honest deity is not something like lunacy. We are not forced to a Lunatic or

Lord decision, Beversluis says. Consider the reaction to Jesus in his own time, he suggests. How did the unbelievers of his time react? Did they brand him a lunatic? No, they branded him a blasphemer. It was perfectly sane, given Judaic messianic expectations, for someone to be believed the messiah, or even for someone to believe of himself that he was the messiah, without questions of lunacy arising at all, Beversluis suggests. So a false belief in his own deity would not, in the original context, be good grounds for our judging Jesus insane.

But the Jewish expectations for a messiah at the time in question were not expectations for God himself, for a literally divine person, to visit Jerusalem. They were expectations of a special ambassador or political deliverer to be raised up by God. To claim to be such a messiah would indeed not be decisive grounds for an insanity judgment. But this was not Jesus' self-assessment as portrayed on occasion in the New Testament documents. It is clearly deity that is at issue. And Beversluis' remarks fail altogether to undermine the Lewis reasoning based on *this* assumption. The argument certainly requires more scrutiny and comment; it cannot be so easily dismissed.

I can sympathize with the intent behind Beversluis' project. In one place he makes a remark about Lewis' BBC talks on which some of his written work is based, which could be extended to the written apologetic corpus as a whole:

My complaint about the Broadcast Talks is not that Lewis fails to be as thorough as his subject matter demands, but that he gives the impression of being thorough. The philosophically unsophisticated reader cannot fail to get the impression that Lewis is covering the ground, that he *is* doing justice to the material, and that he *is* compressing everything that needs to be said into highly compact but basically accurate form, when in fact he is not doing so at all.

While not necessarily sharing Beversluis' assessment of Lewis here, I share his general concern about the way in which some apologetics is done, and received. Indeed, that is why I wrote my own first book, a critique of a very popular evangelical apologist.¹ And, as someone who has attempted the same sort of task, I must say that much of Beversluis' book is well written from a purely stylistic point of view. He is clearly a good writer. Especially when writing about Lewis' views on the problem of evil, he is probing and provocative, although there again, I believe, in error. In a purely literary way, the book is a fairly good read, but I am afraid that it is academically one I cannot highly recommend, either in its tone or in the depth of its philosophical argumentation.

NOTES

1. *Francis Schaffer's Apologetic: A Critique*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976. Reprint Edition, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987.