

» Jerry Bergman replies:

My brief response to Jay Wile's letter concerning my article on C.S. Lewis and his beliefs on creation/evolution follows. I am not able to respond to much of Wile's paper due to severe space limitations. In short, he claims that Lewis was an evolutionist who accepted macroevolution (Wile's term), and I concluded he (Lewis) supported both intelligent design and, at least toward the end of his life, creationism.

I and my co-authors, two of whom are well-known C.S. Lewis scholars who have published several books on Lewis, are writing a book on Lewis and evolution. We document that Lewis was, at least in the latter years of his life, a 'creationist and anti-evolutionist'. Faye Ann Crowell completed a thesis titled *The Theme of the Harmful Effects of Science in the Works of C.S. Lewis* (Texas A & M University) that also eloquently documented our conclusions. The belief that Lewis was an evolutionist comes from some ambiguous statements that Lewis made not long after leaving atheism and becoming a Christian.

Lewis composed 74 books, including several essay collections published after his death, and one could selectively quote from his writings to 'prove' he was an atheist, an evolutionist, or a creationist, as I used the terms. Although parts of my paper could have been worded differently, I stand by all of my conclusions. Wile has managed to find three, possibly four, examples that *appear* to support his position. He then attempts to refute the several score of quotes that I have taken from the remarkably wide range of subjects that Lewis wrote about in his nine books and about 30 essays that explored science and its impact on modern culture. As Wile noted, CMI did an analysis of my paper and his charges and concluded that I was correct.

One of the first published articles that concluded Lewis was not an evolutionist was by anti-creationist Ron Numbers and Professor Ferngren. In some of his early writings, such as *Mere Christianity*, Lewis appeared to accept some evolutionary ideas, at least in part, but as he researched the subject, his writings reflected a vivid opposition to the 'Great Myth' of evolutionary naturalism. As Ferngren and Numbers conclude, with study and reflection, "Lewis grew increasingly uncomfortable with the claims being made for organic evolution."¹ Numbers added that, privately, Lewis found the "... arguments against evolution increasingly compelling—and the pretensions of many biologists repellent. In 1951 he confessed ... *the central and radical lie in the whole web of falsehood that now governs our lives is ... the fanatical and twisted attitudes of its defenders.*"²

Books that influenced Lewis's opposition to Darwinism include *The Everlasting Man*, written by G.K. Chesterton, which suggested that the enormous gap between humans and the apes and other primates argued against human evolution.³ Lewis viewed *The Everlasting Man* book as so important



C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)

that he credited it with moving him to fully embrace Christianity. As he wrote to educator Rhonda Bodle, "the very best popular defense of the full Christian position I know is G. K. Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*".⁴ If an evolutionist of any kind, he would not have stated this about Chesterton's book, but rather would have strongly disagreed with it. The following quote used by Wile supports my position that Lewis supported small changes, often termed microevolution, but does not support, in contrast to Wile's claim, macroevolution. In other words progress is not "the rule in evolution. Actually it is the exception, and for every case of it there are ten of degeneration." This supports genetic entropy causing genetic meltdown.

Lewis adds that we must sharply distinguish between "Evolution as a biological theorem and popular Evolutionism or Developmentalism which is certainly a Myth". From the context it is apparent that by Evolutionism or Development he means common ancestry, or what some would term macroevolution. By evolution, as I made clear, I mean Developmentalism (that which causes *improvements*), not evolution which causes small observable changes, as Lewis defined the term.

As to "What *inclines me now to think that you may be right* in regarding it [evolution] as the central and radical lie in the whole web of falsehood that now governs our lives is not so much your arguments against it as the fanatical and twisted attitudes of its defenders", I do not find the differences he notes "significantly more tentative", but trivial. In my original paper I included the words Jay Wile italicized, but space constraints, as also apply to this response, required cutting the original paper wherever I could. Also, assuming Wile has a point in no way negates my conclusion.

I added 'modern civilization' because Lewis was obviously not talking about

ancient, but modern, civilizations. This objection is irrelevant.

As for the concern about the teacher teaching the standard tale of evolution, Lewis was *not*, according to the quote, saying that “the teacher was teaching the standard tale of evolution” but rather that *Simple people like ourselves* had an idea that Darwin said *that life developed from simple organisms up to the higher plants and animals, finally to the monkey group, and from the monkey group to man*. Lewis added that “The infants however seem to be taught that ‘In the beginning was the Ape’ from whom all other life developed.” It is obvious that his statement, “You need much more *faith* in science than in theology [emphasis in original]”, *refers to both views*.⁵

The fact is Lewis wrote, “*It may be shown, by later biologists, to be a less satisfactory hypothesis than was hoped fifty years ago*”, which is not what Wile claimed: instead he claimed Lewis said, “He *conjectured* that *perhaps some biologists* in the future *might* conclude” that it may be a less satisfactory hypothesis than was hoped fifty years ago. This point is nit picking and goes against much of what Lewis wrote. I cut it back in an effort to meet CMI’s word limit. The fact is Lewis wrote much about the ‘myth’ of Darwinism in his later writings, showing that his thinking developed well beyond his early speculations about evolution. When Lewis traced the history of science, he noted in his usual literary style that “Darwin and Freud let the lion out of the cage”, resulting in much harm to society, and “Science was not the business of Man because Man had not yet become the business of science. It dealt chiefly with the inanimate ... [until and] when Darwin starts monkeying with the ancestry of Man and Freud with his soul ... then indeed the lion will have got out of its cage.”⁶

It is my conclusion, and that of numerous other Lewis scholars, that

Lewis was toward the end of his life a ‘creationist and anti-evolutionist’ as I have defined the terms in my forthcoming book.

Lewis is clearly not an evolutionist as commonly defined. When he wrote this book he was careful to not challenge the evolutionary establishment. Even then he wrote, “may well tell you”. The fact is, Lewis wrote many seemingly contradictory statements that have to be interpreted in context. Even though one could selectively quote Lewis in an attempt to prove he was an evolutionist, I endeavoured to be consistent. One must look at all of his writings on this topic to understand the few places where Lewis *appears* to be a macroevolutionist. To be consistent, Lewis’s statement, “It may well tell you how the brain, through which reason now operates, arose”, refers not to the evolution of the brain from some simple one-celled life-form, but to modern mankind’s brain compared to the brain of men living in primitive societies.

In his Funeral essay, Lewis makes it clear that he accepted microevolution, but not macroevolution. This is clear in his statement:

“... it [evolution] tries to explain, say, how a species that once had wings came to lose them. It explains this by the negative effect of environment operating on small variations. It does not in itself explain the origin of organic life, nor of the variations, nor does it discuss the origin and validity of reason.”

By ‘anthropoid’ it appears that Lewis means a ‘primitive’ but fully human man, not a pre-human apeman as Darwinism teaches. In Lewis terminology, ‘primitive man’ could have been either ‘unfallen man or early fallen man’, not an ape on its way to evolving into a human.⁷ What Lewis wrote elsewhere also argues for the view that he meant not an apeman evolutionary ancestor, but rather a primitive, but fully human, man. Lewis stated in the chapter on ‘The Fall of Man’, in *The Problem*

of Pain, that the Fall “was transmitted by heredity to all generations, for it was the emergence of a new kind of man—a new species, never made by God, had sinned itself into existence”.⁸

True Lewis did not use the term ‘microevolution’ but clearly implied this in his writings, as noted above. The expression “*protohippus* to a modern horse” clearly could refer to microevolution, as accepted by some creationists today.

I disagree with Wile’s interpretation of John West that he lifted out of the book West edited. West wrote that

“Lewis clearly rejected unguided natural selection (evolution #2) as sufficient to produce both the human mind and the kinds of exquisite functional complexity we see throughout nature. In fact, he believed that Darwinian accounts of the development of human reason undermined our confidence in reason. Lewis also rejected Darwinism as a social philosophy (evolution #3), especially efforts to promote eugenics (trying to breed a superior race) and efforts to debunk morality as merely the product of survival of the fittest.”

This hardly makes Lewis an orthodox evolutionist. One review, which summarized much of this book, explores Lewis’s views on Darwinism:

“West lays to rest the myth that Lewis was a gung-ho theistic evolutionist. He admits that Lewis often accepted the plausibility of some kind of common descent. However, later in life he became more skeptical about any form of evolution Two of the most interesting findings by West are: 1) that Lewis was skeptical of Darwinism before he even converted to Christianity; and 2) that Lewis consistently rejected one major feature of Darwinian evolution: its insistence on random, non-teleological processes.”⁹

Wile noted Lewis’s adopted son, Douglas Gresham disagrees with

my conclusions. Gresham's claims reflect the popular media claims, not a careful study of his stepfather's views. I once asked John Eisenhower about his father's religious beliefs and he responded that Dwight was an atheist. I have written a book on Dwight Eisenhower's religion and he was, in fact, a very committed Christian man.¹⁰

Professor Louis Markos wrote, if Lewis "were alive today, he would be an ID (Intelligent Design) person ... [and] would have seen the flaws in Darwin and probably taken up the ID cause."¹¹ Professor Harold Bloom of Yale, an agnostic Jew who opposed Evangelicals and personally knew, and was a fairly close friend of, Lewis and even attended some of his lectures, wrote that Lewis's "attitude towards Evolution ... differs from Creationism only in degree, not in kind. Indeed, Intelligent Design is a kind of parody of Lewis's general view of a Christian cosmos."¹² Owen Barfield wrote that Lewis "didn't believe in evolution Now Lewis, as you know, hated the idea of evolution."¹³

Harvard Professor of Psychiatry Armand M. Nicholi has, for over 30 years, taught a course in Freud at Harvard. The class eventually morphed into a course on both Freud and C.S. Lewis.¹⁴ Dr Nicholi later wrote a book based on his Harvard course, contrasting and comparing the worldviews of these two intellectual giants. As is obvious from his text, Professor Nicholi is an expert on both men.

Both were reared in a religious environment, specifically Christian, both became atheists as adolescents, and both spent their life proselytizing—Freud for atheism and Lewis for theism, specifically Christianity. Nicholi documents how important Intelligent Design was in Lewis's conversion. In a chapter of his book titled *The Creator: Is There an Intelligence Beyond the Universe?*, Nicholi writes that as

"... an atheist, Lewis agreed with Freud that the universe is all that exists—simply an accident that just happened. But eventually Lewis wondered whether its incredible vastness, its precision and order, and its enormous complexity reflected some kind of Intelligence. Is there Someone beyond the universe who created it? Freud answers this 'most important question' with a resounding 'No!' The very idea of 'an idealized Superman' in the sky—to use Freud's phrase—is 'so patently infantile and so foreign to reality, that ... it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never rise above this view of life.'"¹⁵

Freud predicted that as the common people become better educated, "...they would "turn away" from "the fairy tales of religion". He reminds '... us that "the world is no nursery" and strongly advises us to face the harsh reality that we are alone in the universe' Lewis, after his changed worldview ... asserts that the universe is filled with 'signposts' like the 'starry heavens above and the moral law within' ... all pointing with unmistakable clarity to that Intelligence. Lewis advises us to open our eyes, to look around, and understand what we see."¹⁶

One fact that, Nicholi notes, deeply impressed Lewis was his observation that "our physical universe ... is extremely complex ... it comprises atoms, electrons, etc." and "the universe is not just the sum of its physical parts" but much more.¹⁷ This sounds very much like the modern Intelligent Design movement. Conversely, Freud believed that science had shown that God is "so improbable, so incompatible with everything we had laboriously discovered about the reality of the world".¹⁶

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