
The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy: The Lion, The Witch, and the Worldview, Ed. by Gregory Bassham and Jerry L. Walls (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2005), \$17.95 (paperback).

Any surgeon will tell you that it is easy to kill a patient when wielding the scalpel; a careless or imprecise incision is enough to jeopardize a patient's life. Any good literary critic will tell you that it is similarly easy to kill a good story when engaging in literary analysis; a clumsy or ideologically charged analysis can drain a story of its life, making a very good story seem very dull. Arguably, then, it is with some trepidation that philosophers should approach a series of children's books such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*. For it is by no means obvious that such books are the right sort of thing to subject to philosophical analysis—the purpose of children's books generally not being to marshal arguments in favor of anything.

That said, C.S. Lewis was not your ordinary children's author. He was trained in philosophy and many of his philosophical and religious views find their way into *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The purpose of *The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy: The Lion, the Witch, and the Worldview* is to uncover and explore these philosophical and religious views. The book is wide-ranging. It contains twenty-two short essays written (by and large) by philosophers, which are distributed into four sections. The essays in the first section concern broadly epistemological issues; those in the second concern moral issues; those in the third section concern broadly metaphysical themes; and those of the fourth concern topics in the philosophy of religion.

How would one judge whether a compilation of essays written by philosophers on the Narnia books is successful? One mark of its success would be its ability to inspire its readers to read or (as the case may be) re-read the Narnia books. It would, among other things, bring the text alive by calling attention to intriguing twists in plot, moral ambiguities in characters, connections between philosophical themes in the Narnia books that could easily go unnoticed, and nifty defenses of philosophical and religious positions. Does *The Chronicles of Narnia and Philosophy* accomplish this? Not quite, in my judgment. I found the book surprisingly good in places, but disappointing in others.

Let me begin with the disappointing parts. Given the fact that Lewis was explicitly concerned with issues of moral development and character in the Narnia books, one might think that they would provide ample and rich material for moral philosophers. Yet I found the second section of the book the least substantive and engaging. Many of the essays in this section explore how the content of the Narnia books intersects with large philosophical issues such as the objectivity of morality and the views of philosophical giants such as Marx, Mill, and Nietzsche. Rarely, however, did I find that the authors moved the discussion forward on these topics and figures, indi-

cating important ways in which Lewis's books shed light on them. A more fruitful approach to the Narnia books for a moral philosopher, I would have thought, would be to engage in detailed treatments of particular characters and their traits. Consider Susan, for example. The trajectory of her character in Narnia series is fascinating; she moves from being an arch skeptic, to a Narnian queen, to disowning the world of Narnia altogether. Are there clues to her impending apostasy in the Narnia books? And what could explain it?

By contrast, I found (quite unexpectedly), the philosophy of religion section of the book to be the best. Erik Wielenberg explores how encounters with Aslan are both redemptive and painful and why Lewis sees no incompatibility between these dimensions of such experiences. (I cannot help but remark that none of the authors seizes upon the religious dimensions of Eustace's painful encounter with Aslan: in *The Voyage of The Dawn Treader*, Aslan tears off the dragon skin that Eustace had grown and then throws Eustace in the water. The allusion to baptism is striking. Anyone who has seen an infant baptized by full immersion cannot help but notice that the event is at once violent and beautiful, a death and rebirth.) James Sennett treats religious pluralism in the Narnia books, helpfully making distinctions that allow Lewis's view on the topic to emerge. Charles Taliaferro and Rachel Traughber engage with Lewis's employment of the ransom theory of atonement in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, offering a qualified defense of Lewis's position, which finds few defenders these days.

Essays such as these lead me to believe that the Narnia books can be fruitfully discussed by philosophers. Nonetheless, they also demonstrate that the philosopher's handling of these books must be skillful and sensitive enough so as not to make us forget that they are stories intended to capture the imagination of children.

TERENCE CUNEO
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Calvin College
Grand Rapids, MI

Wayne Martindale, *Beyond the Shadowlands: C.S. Lewis on Heaven and Hell*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005). \$15.99 (paperback).

If the chair that you are sitting in, the light you are reading by, and the pages you hold in your hand are just part of the Shadowlands, then what will things be like in that other place, the place we enter into when we die? It is a disquieting thought, one that hovers persistently on the edge of our awareness. We'd just as soon ignore it. We lift a hand to brush it away. In *Beyond the Shadowlands*, Wayne Martindale issues the invitation to take a deep breath and turn and face it.