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The Aquinas Code: Was Thomism the Fundamental Reason Why C. S. Lewis Never Became Catholic?

Review of Stewart Goetz, *A Philosophical Walking Tour with C. S. Lewis: Why It Did Not Include Rome* (Bloomsbury, 2015) 180 pages

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Of the many quotations falsely attributed to C. S. Lewis, the most famous is: "You don't have a soul. You are a Soul. You have a body." Such misattributions circulate in social media and are often as popular as any correct ones, if not more so. But if Stewart Goetz is right in his new philosophical page-turner on Lewis, although the quotation above may be falsely attributed to Lewis, the *idea* behind it is not. Lewis was indeed a soul-body dualist.

This is the first of the book's three major theses. The second is that Lewis held a hedonistic view of happiness – happiness comes down to passive pleasure, and pleasure, even illicit pleasure, is always intrinsically good. Thirdly, Goetz suggests that these two positions, a hedonistic view of happiness and soul-body dualism, prevented Lewis from becoming Catholic, because Catholicism, through Thomism, had adopted opposing views of happiness and the soul.

Readers ought not to dismiss these claims based on these bare summaries. The author is a

professional philosopher who has clearly read *all* of the relevant primary and secondary literature by and about Lewis. Many weighty and lesser-known passages are excavated from Lewis's letters in particular. Consider the evidence for yourself.

In his review of Denis de Rougemont's book on love, Lewis said his purpose was to deter readers either from neglecting the strong arguments because they see weak ones, or from debauching their sense of evidence by accepting the weak arguments because they approve of the strong ones. Something similar applies here, too. *A Philosophical Walking Tour With C. S. Lewis* is highly perceptive: it finds many neglected pieces, even if it does not assemble them perfectly.

The book's major weakness, however, is not this or that argument. It is a methodological one: the recurring appeal to "common sense" in support of this or that argument. Considered broadly as "beliefs arising out of self-awareness, sense perception, memory, and reason, unless or until there was reason to doubt such beliefs" (p. 94), too many views – even opposing ones – fit under this umbrella to make it very helpful.

The author not unjustifiably invokes Lewis's support for this method, but he rather uncritically skims over numerous occasions when Lewis *rejected* the "common" or "popular" understanding of ideas like divine omnipotence, benevolence, morality, and so on. Besides, the author himself argues against many views about Lewis which have become "common sense", not only his barriers to Catholicism. In the end, it is a zero-sum game.

Luckily, it is not fatal. The "common sense" thread could be unwoven without significant damage to the fabric. One of the most unique and eclectic books on Lewis in recent years, it easily shoots to the top rank of studies on Lewis's philosophical and theological thought.

A final word of caution. Though highly recommendable for serious philosophers and students in "Lewisiology", the panting layreader will often have to stop on this strenuous walking tour. Only readers with hard-won philosophical stamina or an inborn philosophical bent will find it easy to agree with Timothy Mawson's pun-like backcover endorsement about the exercise being "both pleasurable and good for the soul".

