

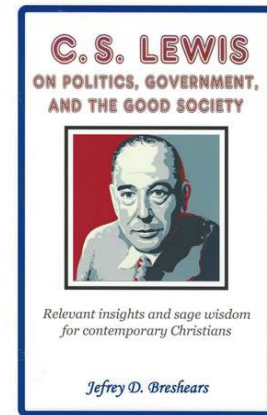
*The Areopagus*  
**C. S. LEWIS**  
**ON POLITICS, GOVERNMENT,  
AND THE GOOD SOCIETY**

**C. S. LEWIS** (1898-1963)

**AN OVERVIEW: 10 TAKE-AWAYS**

**INTRODUCTION**

- The preeminent sage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Lewis combined an enormous breadth and depth of knowledge in the humanities with great wisdom.
- A scholar, philosopher, apologist, theologian, literary critic, sci-fi writer, poet, and author of children's fantasy novels.
- A critic of secular humanism and moral relativism, and its destructive effects on our spiritual and moral culture.
- Primary focus: the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.
- The prototypical Everyman of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- A "mere Christian".
- An Oxford colleague: "Lewis was perhaps the most brilliant man in the world."
- Lewis was not a professional philosopher, theologian, historian, psychologist, or social scientist – but he wrote insightfully and perceptively in all these fields.



**I. Natural Law: The Moral Foundation for Social and Political Civility**

**What Is "Natural Law?"**

- Natural law: The first principles of moral and ethical thinking.
- A generally-accepted standard of self-evident truths regarding right and wrong that human human being sense intuitive as a result of being created in the *imago dei*.

***The Abolition of Man* (1944).**

- An analysis of the philosophical and moral decline of the West.
- The foundation of Lewis' political philosophy.
- Natural Law.
  - The moral precepts that humans sense intuitively as a result of the *Imago Dei*.
  - The *Tao (Dao)* – the self-evident first principles of moral reasoning.

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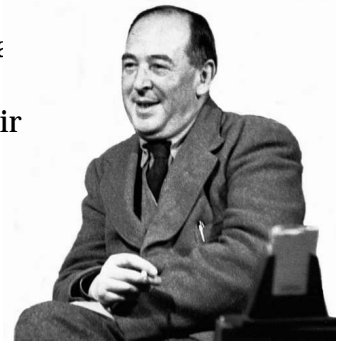
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- The consequences of rejecting the moral law:
  - CSL: Once we eliminate moral standards, we abolish man's moral being and a creature made in the image of God.
  - The result: "Men without chests" who are driven by their passions.
  - Dystopia.
- Natural Law: Some basic principles.
- The classical origins of Natural Law.
- Christian applications.
- Modern proponents.
  - Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."



## II. The Political Philosophy of C. S. Lewis

### "A Necessary Evil."

- CSL: "Government is at its best a necessary evil."
- The "nuts 'n' bolts" and "sausage-making" process of politics.
- A concentration on meta-politics: The proper role and scope of government.
- Both meta-politics and political activism are essential.
  - Without meta-politics, politics becomes strictly pragmatic and driven by politicians' egos, the tyranny of the majority, or the tyranny of the urgent.

### Forays into Political Thought.

- Lewis' political writings.
- A political sophisticate.
- "On Bolshevism" (1939): "Soviet Bolshevism and German Nazism are evil twins."
- Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah J. Watson:
  - "With an education hard to imagine today, Lewis could appreciate the intellectual and philosophical transitions that had transpired from Plato to John Locke to the contemporary theorists of his own day. Lewis was well-versed in philosophy and ethics and political thought, including natural law theory." [*C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law*.]
- CSL: Given the realities of human nature, politics is a "necessary evil."
  - In a normal [good] society, people would go about their lives with relatively little concern about how the government is operating.
  - The more dysfunctional a political system, the more we must pay attention.
  - CSL: "A sick society must think much about politics... To ignore the subject may be fatal cowardice."

### A Rational, Ethical, and Realistic Political Philosophy.

- A traditionalist.
- Not a libertarian, a democrat, or a Christian socialist.
- A "watchman" who offers a prophetic critique of contemporary society and culture.

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- Two major influences:
  - (1) Natural Law ethics.
  - (2) Classical liberalism (constitutional republicanism).
- CSL: “The state exists simply to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings.”
- A traditionalist – not a laissez-faire conservative or libertarian.
  - Lewis valued morality, tradition, and social justice over unrestrained development, science and technology.

#### On Democracy.

- Lewis’ political philosophy based on a rational and realistic view of human nature.
- Two realities:
  - (1) Human beings are innate sinful, so government is a necessary institution.
  - (2) Government is staffed by sinful human beings, so its powers must be limited.
- Liberty must be balanced by private and public virtue.
- The realities of democracy.
- Alexander Tytler’s “Cycle of History.”

#### A Better Alternative: A Constitutional Republic.

#### Two Threats to Western Civilization.

- (1) Technocracy.
  - The scientific- and technological-industrial complex.
  - Jacques Ellul in *The Technological Society* (1954): The cult of technology poses the greatest threat to human freedom.
    - For scientists and technocrats, the question is always, “Can we do this?” rather than “Should we do this?”
- (2) A “World Welfare State” – a secular/socialist New World Order.

### III. Ruminations on the Good Society

#### The Basis for a Good Society.

#### A Critique of Christian Sacralism.

- The social and political cultures in which the Old and New Testaments were written were radically different from modern times.
- A good society would not be a sacralistic (or theocratic) society.
  - “Christian nationalism,” “Christian reconstructionism,” “theonomy,” “dominionism.”
  - CSL: “Theocracy is the worst of all governments.”
- A good society operates on the principles of Natural Law.

#### A Critique of Christian Socialism.

- Socialism in the early church.
  - Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; and II Cor. 8:13-14.  
(Also note: I Thes. 4:11-12 and II Thes. 3:10.)
  - Note: New Testament “Christian socialism” was voluntary.
  - It has nothing in common with mandatory government-imposed redistribution of wealth via confiscatory taxation.

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- What about “social justice” Christianity (“liberation theology”)?
  - We cannot impose New Testament social and economic values on mainstream society.
  - Like Fundamentalists in the past, left-wing Christians want to use the power of government to enforce their idea of “social justice.”
  - Liberation theology is more Marxist than Christian.

### The Good Society and Modern Conservatism.

- Lewis was a self-described “traditionalist”.
- Lewis was not a libertarian.
- A good society, while protecting freedom within all proper parameters, would not promote immorality, hedonism, materialism, and irresponsible lifestyles.
- Social institutions would cultivate healthy values based on the Golden Rule.
- A good society would promote many conservative (i.e., traditional) values.
  - Natural law and classical liberal principles.
  - Traditional moral values.
  - Traditional family values.
  - Personal responsibility.
  - Respect for elders.
  - Respect for authority.
  - Individual responsibility.
  - CSL: “No passengers and no parasites.”
- The good society and good work.

### What About Socialism?

- CSL: In some respects, a good society would be “socialistic.”
  - A society that encourages cooperation and the common good.
- Class conflict in history.
- Socialism and the early church.
  - CSL: “Nineteenth century Christian socialism posed the greatest threat to the kingdom of darkness.”
- Contemporary secular socialism.
- The neo-Marxist influences.
- Eight characteristics of contemporary secular socialism.
- A Political Orientations scale.
- *That Hideous Strength* (1945):
  - State socialism has a totalitarian impulse.
  - The capitalist/socialist agenda.
- “Is Progress Possible? Willing Slaves of the Welfare State” (1958).
  - Many people willingly sacrifice personal freedom for government-guaranteed security.
  - The emerging welfare state and the global technocracy.
  - True “progress”.

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- Manifestations of socialism:
  - George Orwell's *1984* (1948).
  - Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932).
  - Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955).

## The Summa

### Lewisian Political Philosophy.

- Why politics matters.
- Natural law: The moral foundation for social and political civility.
- The emerging New World Order.
  - Big government.
  - Unregulated corporate capitalism.
  - Technocracy.
  - A socialistic "World Welfare State."
  - Democracy.

### Onward: Our Calling as Christian Citizens.



- The essence of Christian faith.
- Christianity as a comprehensive worldview.
- The problem of Christian pietism.
- Why politics and government matter.
  - The laws, policies and programs of government significantly impact the quality of life for citizens.
  - We cannot truly love ourselves or others if we are indifferent about the kind of society, culture, laws and public policies that regulate (and often control) our lives.
- The first principle of responsible citizenship:
  - Politics is mostly about damage-control.
- As citizens in a free nation, it is irresponsible not to be well-informed and actively engaged in the great issues of our time.
- Jacques Maritain: The role of a Christian in society is not that of a partisan but as a social prophet and a watchman.
  - This does not preclude our active involvement in the great moral battles of our day.
- C. S. Lewis cared about politics and government because political systems, laws and policies can either help or hinder the fulfillment of our purpose in life.
- We must be well-informed, vigilant and active in terms of exposing and defeating those politicians whose agendas pose the great threats to what is TRUE, GOOD, and BEAUTIFUL.
- Edmund Burke: "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men [and women] do nothing."

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