

C. S. LEWIS

ON POLITICS, GOVERNMENT, AND THE GOOD SOCIETY

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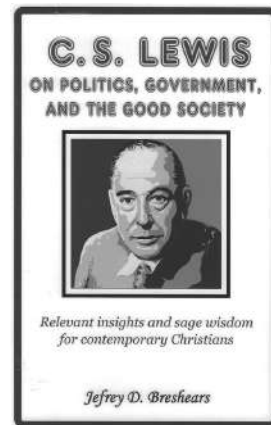
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C. S. LEWIS (1898-1963)

AN OVERVIEW: 10 TAKE-AWAYS

INTRODUCTION

- The preeminent sage of the 20th 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 20th 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 Good Government

***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.
- The consequences of rejecting the moral law:
 - CSL: Once we eliminate moral standards, we abolish man as a moral being and a creature made in the image of God.
 - The result: “Men without chests” who are driven by their passions.
 - Dystopia.

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- Natural Law: Some basic principles.
- The classical origins of Natural Law.
- Christian applications.
- Modern proponents.
 - Martin Luther King Jr.’s “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.
- CSL: 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.
- 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.

- A political philosophy based on a rational, ethical 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.

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Two Threats to Western Civilization.

- (1) Technocracy.
 - The scientific- and technological-industrial complex.
 - Jacques Ellul: The cult of technology poses the greatest threat to human freedom.
- (2) A “World Welfare State” – a secular/socialist New World Order.

III. Ruminations on the Good Society

The Good Society and Christianity.

- A good society would not be a sacralistic (or theocratic) society.
 - CSL: “Theocracy is the worst of all governments.”
- The social and political culture in which the New Testament was written was radically different than in modern times.
- A good society operates on the principles of Natural Law.

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.
 - Traditional moral values.
 - Traditional family values.
 - Personal responsibility.
- “Good work.”

What About Christian Socialism?

- Socialism in the early church.
- New Testament “Christian socialism” has nothing in common with mandatory government-imposed redistribution of wealth via confiscatory taxation.
- 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.”
- CSL: “Nineteenth century Christian socialism posed the greatest threat to the kingdom of darkness.”
- The perversion of the socialist ideal.
- Liberation theology is more Marxist than Christian.

What About State Socialism?

- CSL: In some respects, a good society would be “socialistic.”
 - A society that encourages cooperation and the common good.
- Class conflict in history.
- Contemporary democratic socialism.
- What’s wrong with socialism.
- *That Hideous Strength* (1945): State socialism has a totalitarian impulse.

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