C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law

Conventional wisdom holds that C. S. Lewis was uninterested in politics and public affairs. The conventional wisdom is wrong. As Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah J. Watson show in this groundbreaking work, Lewis was deeply interested in the fundamental truths and falsehoods about human nature and how these conceptions manifest themselves in the contested and turbulent public square. Ranging from the depths of Lewis’ philosophical treatments of epistemology and moral pedagogy to practical considerations of morals legislation and responsible citizenship, this book explores the contours of Lewis’ multi-faceted Christian engagement with political philosophy generally and the natural-law tradition in particular. Drawing from the full range of Lewis’ corpus and situating his thought in relationship to seminal thinkers both ancient and modern, C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law offers an unprecedented look at politics and political thought from the perspective of one of the twentieth century’s most influential writers.

Justin Buckley Dyer is associate professor of political science and director of the Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy at the University of Missouri. He is the author of Natural Law and the Antislavery Constitutional Tradition and Slavery, Abortion, and the Politics of Constitutional Meaning. He earned a Ph.D. in government at the University of Texas at Austin and a B.A. and M.P.A. at the University of Oklahoma.

Micah J. Watson is 2015–16 William Spoelhof Teacher-Scholar Chair and associate professor of political science at Calvin College. He is the co-editor of Natural Law and Evangelical Political Thought. In 2010–11 he was the William E. Simon Fellow in Religion and Public Life at Princeton University. He earned a Ph.D. in politics at Princeton University, and M.A. in Church-State Studies at Baylor University.
C.S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law

JUSTIN BUCKLEY DYER
University of Missouri

MICAH J. WATSON
Calvin College
For our parents
For, above all other spheres of human life, the Devil claims politics for his own, as almost the citadel of his power.

– C.S. Lewis to Don Giovanni Calabria (August 10, 1953)
## Contents

*Acknowledgments*  
 ix  

1. The Apolitical and Political C.S. Lewis  
   1  

2. Creation, Fall, and Human Nature  
   18  

3. Divine Commands, Natural Law, and Modern Politics  
   41  

4. The Early Modern Turn and the Abolition of Man  
   61  

5. Lewis’ Lockean Liberalism  
   83  

6. Screwtape is in the Details: Politics in the Post-Christian West  
   104  

7. Conclusion: Politics in the Shadowlands  
   132  

*Selected Bibliography*  
 147  

*Index*  
155
Lewis wrote that friendship could be a school of virtue or a school of vice, making good men better and bad men worse. We are grateful for the many friends who have made this book much better than it otherwise would have been. On the business side, we would like to thank Lew Bateman and his editorial team at Cambridge University Press for their working closely with us on this project. We also acknowledge helpful feedback from the anonymous reviewers at the Press. Chapter 2 grew out of an article previously published as “Lewis, Barth, and the Natural Law” in Journal of Church and State 57(1): 1–17, the original research for which was supported by a summer fellowship from the H.B. Earhart Foundation. Permission to republish portions of that essay here is gratefully acknowledged. As a co-authored project, we each took somewhat different paths to our joining forces to work on this book. Yet we did have the opportunity to present together various parts of the book, receiving very constructive comments from Paul DeHart and Kody Cooper at a 2014 meeting of the Southwestern Political Science Association and from members of a panel at the 2013 Symposium on Religion and Public Life at the Paul B. Henry Institute of Calvin College. Along the way we also have amassed our own individual debts of gratitude.

I (JBD) thank the many people who provided feedback and encouragement throughout this project. Foremost among them is my co-author for accepting an invitation to join me in this work and for seeing it through to the end. J. Budziszewski, Josh Hawley, Carson Holloway, Nathan Tiemeyer, and Mark Tungesvik each read through and commented on various parts of the manuscript. Several of my colleagues at the University of Missouri took an interest in the topic from the beginning, and I am
grateful to Vanya Krieckhaus and John Petrocik for many serious discussions – and some friendly banter – about Lewis, natural law, and moral realism. During the 2014–2015 academic year, I had the privilege of teaching both an undergraduate tutorial and a general community seminar on Lewis’ political thought. In different ways the enthusiasm and fresh insight from those two groups sharpened my thinking about the relevance of Lewis’ writings to the world of politics. The University of Missouri has been a terrific place to pursue my intellectual interests, and I thank Cooper Drury, Chair of the Political Science Department, and Michael O’Brien, Dean of the College of Arts and Science, for their support.

My wife, Kyle, and our boys, Bennett and Pierce, have been steadfast in their love and encouragement. Kyle and I grew up together, and one of our favorite teachers, Mr. Lowe, first introduced us to Lewis when he made The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe mandatory reading in his fifth-grade class. Years later, another of my favorite teachers, Mrs. Moore, gave the students in my high school English class a modest assignment: go to the library, pick out a book, and read it. As I scanned the musty and worn-out books on the shelf that day, the name “C.S. Lewis” on the spine of a book titled Mere Christianity caught my eye. I recognized Lewis’ name from the Narnia stories and so I chose to read that book. The first chapter of Mere Christianity, which is a short meditation on the law of human nature, sparked a life-long intellectual interest in the perennial philosophy of natural law. I am grateful to have a career that allows me to indulge that interest and for the teachers who have guided me along the way. To my mom and dad – my first and best teachers – I dedicate this book.

I (MJW) am grateful to Baylor University’s Barry Hankins, Scott Moore, and Ralph Wood, who oversaw my first foray into Lewis studies in an MA thesis in the late 1990s. Robert George and J. Budziszewski have been more than generous in providing feedback and guidance about the natural law and about Lewis. As this project straddled academic seasons at Union University and Calvin College, I’m grateful for the support and input of friends and colleagues at both places. Sean Evans was a particularly supportive Chair and friend. Mark Campbell, Bryan Carrier, Tim Ellsworth, Scott Huehn, Paul Jackson, and Ben Mitchell all encouraged me in various ways with this project. Justin Barnard read over the manuscript and in countless of office visits and conversations has shaped my view of Lewis and so many other things. Jesse Covington and Bryan McGraw have been faithful friends in offering constructive criticism and
Acknowledgments

suggestions. My new colleagues at Calvin have been nothing short of wonderful, and I am profoundly grateful to the Van Reken family for supporting the William Spoelhof Teacher-Scholar-in-Residence Chair. I would also be remiss if I did not thank my co-author for inviting me to join him in this endeavor.

While the life of this book project is only a couple of years, the presence of C.S. Lewis has lived with my family for much longer. I cannot quite apologize for that, but I do thank my wife Julie for all the reading, proofreading, and listening she has done, not to mention making possible our life together and the lives that we have been blessed to welcome: Abigail, Anastasia, Annika, Alexandra, and John. God uses you to remind me that there is more life and wonder to this season in the “Shadowlands” than I would have ever realized on my own. Finally, I express my love and gratitude to my mom and my dad, who first introduced me to an imaginary world with talking animals and a majestic Lion. Like Lewis, their greatness lies in their pointing me toward a reality beyond the one I can see, and it is to them that I dedicate this book.