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Review of C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law

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as to what, precisely, Duriez has in mind here, but speculation is all that is available. In short: readers who do not already know much about the *Inklings* may find this passage and others like it somewhat confusing.

All in all, however, *The Oxford Inklings* is a great success. It can be recommended to anyone with an interest in the *Inklings*, and strongly recommended to those who already have some familiarity with them and are seeking a fresh perspective. This book is a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion of Lewis, Tolkien, and their circle.

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Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah J. Watson, *C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law* (New York, NY: Cambridge, 2016). ix+160 pages. \$26.99. ISBN 9781107518971.

There's a long-standing rumor that C. S. Lewis was curiously silent about contemporary politics during his lifetime. His father Albert, a police court solicitor in Belfast for 40 years, often discussed local politics at the family home Little Lea, to the chagrin of his two young sons. Although the boys would create an imaginary world titled Boxen with anthropomorphic characters and the inimitable toad, Lord Big, this was perhaps the only positive consequence of Albert's endless prattling about Belfast politics. Youngest son Clive hated such racquet, and eschewed the topic, at least publicly, for most of his life. However, Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah J. Watson reexamine such a claim in their new work: "Although many of Lewis's best-known works contain withering critiques of modern political thought, Lewis never wrote a treatise on politics or offered a sustained vision of a well-functioning political order. "Even so," they continue, "Lewis did think deeply about politics, and he was well aware of the great conversation about human nature and political order that philosophers had been engaged in across the centuries" (88). More precisely, Dyer and Watson explore the philosophical and theoretical origins of Lewis's view on public morality. Shaped significantly through correspondence and fictional/instructional texts, this work places Lewis's perception of politics firmly in context.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this book is its thorough, erudite

examination of the philosophical underpinnings of Lewis's core beliefs about human morality. In such essays as "Democracy" and "Equality" and longer works such as *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis describes his principle persuasions about power, relationships among humans, and the unified perceptions which would most benefit society. These insights derive from the conception that we are inherently conflicted beings—partly spiritual, partly mortal—whose primary obstacle is to overcome the self before proceeding to govern a population. Thus public morality stems from an individual approach to ideas and ethics. This, Lewis argued in *Mere Christianity*, is known as Natural Law, rules and conduct which all people and all nationalities would find favorable. Natural law usurped modern instincts that rejected God and religious morality (a movement which catalyzed relativism). However, Natural Law, even for those who did not prescribe to a specific religion, still benefits society while appealing to the rational aspects of modern culture: "It was the natural law, for Lewis, that brought together goodness and reason, and any attack on the natural-law tradition threatened to tear the two asunder" (36).

Certainly, Dyer and Watson do not shy away from Lewis in context to the tumultuous twentieth century events and the growing popularity of subjectivism. Natural law posited that right and wrong are not predicated on circumstance; even in the dark hours of a world conflict, a public morality was needed to understand and assimilate the events unfolding on the global stage: "The challenge faced by the modern world is that many people deny that morality has any objective basis at all. Morality, on various modern accounts, is merely a social construct that exists to serve the interests of the creators" (45). The prevailing sense of relativism paved the way for "collective moral nihilism," state the authors, yet in their demonstration of these regimes (Nazism, Fascism, and Communism) the authors fail to mention how religion was often used to lay the foundation for totalitarian governments (Hitler claiming to be "Christian," for example). Lewis hints at such a suggestion in *That Hideous Strength*, when it is revealed that Reverend Straik, a peripheral yet necessary character in Lewis's haunting tale, is a member of N.I.C.E. Such political chaos led the population to believe diplomacy would lead to peace, but Lewis was wary of such an unhealthy dependency on the "welfare state." Lewis, throughout his body of work, strongly objected to the extended effectiveness of national

policies. “Lewis’s political thought,” the authors rightly argue, “is so imbued with concerns about governmental overreach that even a positive portrayal slips back into warning about the dangers of abuse” (102). In the end, it was public morality, individual decisions and not corporate ones, which alter the cultural climate. Dyer and Watson highlight this aspect well throughout the text, highlighting Lewis’s contrast to Barth, as well as his connections with Plato, Aristotle, Milton, John Stuart Mill, and perhaps most substantially, John Locke (Social Contract Theory).

C. S. Lewis on Politics and Natural Law is a fine work of scholarship. The authors are thoroughly knowledgeable, underscoring the importance of past social theories which shape Lewis’s response to World War II (both his nonfiction and fiction works), as well as his perceptions surrounding governmental limitations, the idea of equality, and thoughts on democratic and totalitarian governments. With its premise rooted in theory, this book is not recommended for the casual reader, but Lewis fans and scholars who enjoy in-depth, philosophical examinations of Lewis’s perspective should certainly add this text to their library.

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Heidi Haverkamp, *Advent in Narnia: Reflections for the Season* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2015). ix + 100 pages. \$16.00. ISBN 9780664261269.

The idea has crossed the minds of church workers for over half a century: how can the Chronicles of Narnia be used as a springboard to encourage Christian spiritual formation? Different curricula have been developed with young people in mind, including the ill-fated 1978 attempt *Voyage to Narnia: Chronicles of the Christian Faith from C.S. Lewis*,³ which quickly became unavailable due to copyright infringements. More recent and successful attempts have integrated excerpts from various film adaptations of the Narnia stories into their lesson plans, from the 1979 animated version of *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe* to the big

¹ Denny Rydberg, Kathryn Lindscoog, and Marshall Shelley, *Voyage to Narnia: Chronicles of the Christian Faith* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1978).