

## CONTEXTUALIZING C. S. LEWIS’ CHRISTIAN LIBERTARIANISM: ENGAGING DYER AND WATSON AND BEYOND

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*Abstract:* Analyzes C. S. Lewis’ Christian libertarianism by engaging important recent scholarship on Lewis’ natural law-based political thought and by considering both Lewis’ place within Christian classical liberal/libertarian thought since the late eighteenth century and how his insights are germane to contemporary political and ethical controversies.

*Keywords:* C. S. Lewis, classical liberalism, political philosophy, Dyer, Watson, libertarianism, NHS, Madison, Bastiat, Acton, Machen, Tocqueville, homosexuality

### I. INTRODUCTION

The notion that C. S. Lewis was effectively apolitical has remained the conventional understanding of Lewis’ admirers. Such a belief is no doubt understandable in light of the words of his closest relatives. Lewis’ brother Warnie, acknowledging Lewis’ reputed “contempt for politics and politicians,” spoke of Lewis’ enduring “disgust and revulsion from the very idea of politics.”<sup>2</sup> In his biography of Lewis, Lewis’ stepson Douglas

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah J. Watson, *C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 5. I would like to thank Calvin College, whose sabbatical release time benefitted the research and writing of this essay. Thanks also to Jamin Hübner and the anonymous readers at *CLR* for their helpful suggestions. Finally,

Gresham writes that “Jack was not interested in politics.”<sup>3</sup> And less than a week before his November 1963 death, Lewis himself wrote to Mrs. Frank Jones, “Our papers at the moment are filled with nothing but politics, a subject in which I cannot take any interest.”<sup>4</sup> There is also the oft-retold account of Lewis refusing the 1951 offer by Conservative Party leader Winston Churchill to bear the honorary title “Commander of the British Empire.” Lewis wrote to Churchill’s secretary explaining that, though he appreciated the offer, he was, in the words of John G. West, “worried about the political implications.”<sup>5</sup> Although Lewis admired Churchill, he wrote to Churchill’s secretary, “There are always...knaves who say, and fools who believe, that my religious writings are all covert anti-Leftist propaganda, and my appearance in the Honours List wd. of course strengthen their hands. It is therefore better that I shd. not appear there.”<sup>6</sup> In this letter, Lewis makes clear that he does not want to be associated with a particular political party or movement.

But Lewis’ aversion to party politics does not mean that that he was unconcerned with political matters. Rather, the notion that Lewis was in fact utterly apolitical has in recent decades been challenged and effectively discredited by a series of writings that have highlighted Lewis’ concern with various political issues, with certain recent articles demonstrating Lewis’ commitment, not to party politics, but to principles of limited

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas Gresham, *Jack’s Life: The Life Story of C. S. Lewis* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2005), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Dyer and Watson, *C. S. Lewis*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> John G. West, “Finding the Permanent in the Political: C. S. Lewis as a Political Thinker,” in Andrew A. Tadie and Michael Macdonald, eds., *Permanent Things: Toward the Recovery of a More Human Scale at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 137. My discussion of Lewis and Churchill follows West’s account. West’s article is available online at <http://www.discovery.org/a/457>.

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 3: *Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy 1950-1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 147.

government.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in a 2009 article, Steven Gillen observes that, in light of Lewis’ theologically informed beliefs in limited government, “one could rightly call him a ‘Christian Libertarian.’”<sup>8</sup> As we shall see later in this essay, Lewis’ libertarianism is not without caveat, and, as the preceding paragraph suggests, he avoided political classification and was certainly wary of the damage of associating Christianity with a particular political movement. Nonetheless, it seems fair to recognize that Lewis’ political thought, albeit not expressed particularly systematically, can in general accurately be considered Christian libertarian, provided that we always remember that, for Lewis, his libertarianism should be recognized as emanating from and necessarily subordinate to his Christianity and not vice-versa.

## II. REVIEWING DYER AND WATSON ON LEWIS

Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah J. Watson’s *C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law* offers the most thorough rebuttal to date of the idea that Lewis was indifferent about politics and its societal ramifications. Furthermore,

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Gilbert Meilander, *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980); John G. West, “Finding the Permanent in the Political: C. S. Lewis as a Political Thinker,” 137-48; Judith Wolf, “On Power,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 174-88; Stanley Hauerwas, “On Violence,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*, 189-202; Steven Gillen, “C. S. Lewis and the Meaning of Freedom,” *Journal of Markets and Morality* 12.2 (Fall 2009): 259-76 (available online); David J. Theroux, “C. S. Lewis on Mere Liberty and the Evils of Statism,” in *Culture & Civilization*, volume 3: *Globalism*, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (New Brunswick, NJ: 2011), 192-210 (available online at <https://www.issues4life.org/pdfs/dtarticle.pdf>); for a perspective that argues for Lewis’ statist sympathies on matters of health care, see William Fraatz, “C. S. Lewis and America’s Health Care Debate,” *Anglican Theological Review* 94.3 (Summer 2012): 383-402. Gillen’s and Theroux’s pieces specifically emphasize Lewis’ deep suspicion of statism and his belief in limited government. My recent online article for the Foundation for Economic Education, “Was C. S. Lewis a Libertarian?” (October 22, 2017), draws on Dyer and Watson’s book and Theroux’s article.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Gillen, “C. S. Lewis and the Meaning of Freedom,” 272.

although Dyer and Watson do not use the term “libertarian” to describe Lewis, they do, throughout their well-structured presentation, demonstrate Lewis’ commitments to the natural law tradition and to limited government. And they emphasize that Lewis’ said commitments, evident in the various genres of his writings throughout his career, are grounded in Lewis’ Christian convictions. Indeed, Dyer and Watson’s book is a watershed effort in the growing understanding of Lewis as a thinker whose understanding of Christianity ineluctably led him to shun statism and embrace the classical liberal tradition, particularly those elements of that tradition that distrusted human power because it distrusted fallen humanity.

At the same time, Dyer and Watson’s slim volume, for all its strengths, is necessarily limited in its coverage, and one may fairly argue that it pays insufficient attention to Lewis’ classical liberal/libertarian beliefs. Indeed, far from being the final word on its subject matter, it invites further investigation into Lewis’ Christian embrace of the traditions of natural law and limited government. Consequently, I will in the following pages seek to offer a thorough discussion of Dyer and Watson’s book even as I, at times drawing on other scholars of Lewis and pieces by Lewis that Dyer and Watson do not thoroughly address, engage certain topics that the authors either neglect or only briefly cover.<sup>9</sup> Then moving beyond Dyer and Watson’s book, the remaining sections of this essay seek, respectively, to situate Lewis within the broader stream of Christian classical liberal/libertarian thinkers that preceded him in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries; and to discuss how Lewis’ writings might or might not be considered with reference to a Christian libertarian perspective concerning current debates regarding same-sex marriage and health care. Throughout the first half of this essay, I endeavor to suggest

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<sup>9</sup> My overview of *C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law* is an adapted and significantly extended version of my recent review of that book in *Christianity and Literature* 67.1 (December 2017): 247-50. Used with permission. Future quotations of Dyer and Watson’s book will be referenced parenthetically by page number.

various ways in which Dyer and Watson’s book might inspire further exploration into various matters concerning Lewis’ discussions of politics and the natural law; in the second half, I suggest how Lewis can be properly understood as a Christian libertarian thinker whose ideas well fit within the tradition of Christian classical liberalism/libertarianism since the late eighteenth century and provide insight into the controversies of our present day.

### III. A DETAILED ENGAGEMENT WITH DYER AND WATSON

#### *Lewis, Politics, Reason, and Human Nature*

The book’s opening chapter, “The Apolitical and Political C. S. Lewis,” notes that although both the testimony of Lewis’ close friends and relatives and Lewis’ personal statements (some already quoted above) proclaim his disdain for politics and politicians, his writings reveal his broader political concerns. Both Lewis’ novels, including the *Chronicles of Narnia*, the Space Trilogy, and *Till We Have Faces*; and his apologetic and ethical writings, including *The Screwtape Letters*, *Mere Christianity*, and *The Abolition of Man*, “brim with political themes” (p. 11). Dyer and Watson contend that although “Lewis was not actively involved in partisan politics and took little interest in transitory policy questions,” he “had much to say about the underlying foundations of a just political order” (p. 7). They agree with West’s premise that Lewis was “always interested in identifying the ‘permanent in the political’” (p. 7). Moreover, biographical evidence suggests Lewis’ lifelong interest in politics. At age ten, Lewis wrote an essay entitled “Home Rule” concerning “the future relationship between Ireland and the British crown” (p. 8). At age twelve, Lewis composed two novels that “revolved entirely around politics” (p. 5). Lewis regularly taught political theory at Magdalen College, Oxford. And his personal letters, including one written only six days before his death, comment on various contemporary political events and issues.

Chapter 2, "Creation, Fall, and Human Nature," addresses "the underlying philosophical commitments that ground Lewis' thought" (p. 14). Dyer and Watson demonstrate how Lewis' Christianity compelled him to believe in a world with a natural order that was created good but was also profoundly fallen. Lewis' belief in natural law is seen in his book *Miracles* (1947), which articulates Lewis' "argument from reason," an "argument for the plausibility of theism and creation" that contradicts both "blind, purposeless materialism and teleological, rational naturalism" (p. 26). Indeed, "Rational thought...is a metaphysical intrusion into the physical world," for "reason is not simply a part of nature, and nature could have never produced reason" (p. 28). For Lewis, "the reason of God is the self-existent principle by which the natural world was created" (p. 29). God gave humans "the choice and the duty to rationally rule their nonrational appetites and passions," but fallen humans allow "appetite and passion" to rebel against God-given reason, causing human reason to be "disfigured and out of harmony with the natural world it was designed to rule" (p. 30). Ultimately, human will is even more damaged by the Fall than is human reason, but "neither is *totally* depraved" (p. 33). Rather, fallen humans are able exercise reason and will, and even those without access to the special revelation of the Bible "can be illuminated by God's revelation in nature" (p. 35). In holding this position, Lewis stands in the line of Thomas Aquinas and the Anglican theologian Richard Hooker, whose influence Lewis acknowledges in his *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century* (1954).

Calling Lewis "a trenchant moral realist but a reluctant natural-law theorist," Dyer and Watson cite *Mere Christianity* (1952) to assert Lewis' contention that "belief in a moral law known through the exercise of reason" is "one of the pillars of 'all clear thinking about the universe we live in'" (p. 37). According to Lewis, the foundations of morality "are known through reason and morally obligatory to follow" through reason's conquest over "appetites and passions" (p. 37). Dyer and Watson then connect Lewis' beliefs concerning the moral law to Dostoevsky's

depiction of Raskonikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), stating that for both authors “the ingrained moral law is an integral part of human experience” and what “demonstrates to us our wretched condition” (p. 39). Dyer and Watson’s investigation of Dostoevsky’s novel is brief, and they offer no evidence that Lewis ever wrote about, taught, or even read Dostoevsky. But their analysis—which is valuable in and of itself—invites readers to consider what other literary characters might be analyzed through the moral law rubric Dyer and Watson discuss here. As a scholar currently writing on John Milton’s influence upon Lewis, I myself am exploring how Lewis’ moral law rubric can be applied to the character of Satan in Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost*, a connection all the more appropriate in light of the fact that Lewis was an accomplished Milton scholar whose discussion of Satan in his book *A Preface to “Paradise Lost”* (1942) has influenced the scholarly and popular understanding of Milton’s Satan for three-quarters of a century.

*Natural Law and Lewis’ Conflict with Karl Barth*

Chapter 3, “Divine Commands, Natural Law, and Modern Politics,” addresses Lewis’ conflict with Karl Barth on the matter of natural law. In his 1934 Barmen Declaration, Barth, protesting the German Evangelical Church’s acquiescence to Nazism, “traced the errors of the ‘German Christian’ movement—and especially the syncretism of Nazism and Christianity—to the church’s acceptance of ‘natural theology’” (p. 42). In doing so, Barth opposed the tendency of contemporary liberal Christian theology to challenge the reliability of the Bible in favor of “affirming God’s progressive revelation in human history” (p. 42), a viewpoint that was used to view Hitler as “a source of specific new revelation of God” (p. 41). Barth’s response to such heresy, however, included a rejection of the theologically based natural law tradition embraced throughout the centuries by orthodox Catholics and Protestants. Barth reaffirmed his position in his August 1941 letter to Britain, published as the pamphlet

*This Christian Cause*. That same month, Lewis responded to the Nazis by affirming the ideals of natural law, arguing in a BBC broadcast (later incorporated into *Mere Christianity*) that the “basic moral principles” revealed to all humanity point to the deficiencies in Nazi moral ideology (p. 44). In contrast to Barth’s sharp antithesis between scriptural revelation and natural revelation, Lewis’ theory of natural law—articulated most clearly in his 1943 article “The Poison of Subjectivism”—“rested on an ontological claim about the divine nature, a claim that was inseparable from Christian revelation” (p. 53). A decade later, affirming the natural law tradition of Richard Hooker, Lewis in *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century* lashes out against what he called “Barthianism,” a theology that, in Lewis’ words, “set a God of inscrutable will” against the “accursed nature of man.” Lewis was so grieved by Barth’s rejection of natural theology that he went so far as to call Barth’s theology “something ‘not unlike devil worship’” (p. 48). For Lewis, Dyer and Watson write, “the price of abandoning the natural law tradition...was practical nihilism” (p. 55).

The chapter concludes by looking briefly at Lewis’ efforts to articulate truth to modern audiences through fiction, an effort, Dyer and Watson aver, inspired by Lewis’ increasing skepticism toward “the ability of rational arguments to penetrate the defenses modern society had erected against reason itself” (p. 59). Dyer and Watson specifically mention the final volume of the Space Trilogy, *That Hideous Strength* (1945), as the best example of Lewis’ fictional efforts to communicate such truth. Along those same lines, we might also consider that Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-56) can be viewed in a similar vein, specifically in terms of how Lewis’ novels for children—an endeavor Lewis began after his Space Trilogy—impress upon young hearts and minds timeless truths that will be more easily understood and rationally embraced in adulthood because of the foundation laid by Lewis’ fiction. Lewis himself touches on this matter in his essay “On Juvenile Tastes” (1958), in which he affirms that “[t]he right sort” of children’s book authors “work from the common, universally



human, ground they share with children, and indeed with countless adults.”<sup>10</sup>

*Lewis and Objective Moral Truth*

Chapter 4, “The Early Modern Turn and the Abolition of Man,” focuses on Lewis’ commitment to objective moral truth, both in his rebuttals of early modern champions of subjectivism and in his articulation of moral truth within his contemporary context. Dyer and Watson trace Lewis’ discussion in *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century* of how medieval Christian understandings of natural law and truth, based on Augustine and Aquinas, were challenged by figures such as Machiavelli and Hobbes, and later by Rousseau and Hegel, all of whom articulated in different ways the right of the ruler or ruling class to determine what is right and good. This “new theory of sovereignty,” in Lewis’ words, “makes political power inventive, creative. Its seat is transferred from the reason which humbly and patiently discerns what is right to the will which decrees what shall be right” (p. 67). This new theory, as Lewis suggests in “Screwtape Proposes a Toast” (1959), paved the way for the modern totalitarianism evidenced by “both the Nazi and the Communist state” and its disdain toward personal liberty and self-government (p. 69).

Lewis’ most sustained affirmation of objective truth is *The Abolition of Man* (1943), which marshals the natural law tradition across history and cultures to oppose the Hobbesian perspective—articulated, to Lewis’ great consternation, in a popular contemporary grammar book for secondary schools—that ultimately “makes appetite the legitimate (or at least unavoidable) ruler of reason, with thoughts serving passions ‘as scouts and spies’ that ‘find the way to the things desired’” (p. 77). *Abolition* also expresses Lewis’ concern that such thought permeates even liberal

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<sup>10</sup> C. S. Lewis, “On Juvenile Tastes,” in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1982), 51.

democracies, which, in the absence of belief in objective morality, give way to “a different form of totalitarianism: a benevolent scientific bureaucracy, which destroys or damages mediating institutions such as the church and the family, and makes genuine freedom (understood as a virtuous life built on economic, cultural, and ecclesiastical independence) difficult to achieve” (p. 61). In his novel *That Hideous Strength* (1945), Lewis depicts such a scientific bureaucracy—one which proves to be not benevolent but murderous—in the form of the National Institutes for Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.), a “scientific social planning agency” that seeks “to overcome nature with science” (p. 81-82).

*Fallen Human Nature and the Need for Limited Government*

Chapter 5, “Lewis’ Lockean Liberalism,” explains how Lewis’ commitment to natural law theory did not translate into a belief in a hierarchical system of government. Rather, Lewis’ Christian convictions led him to the belief that government should be limited and decentralized. And it is on this matter, I would argue, where Lewis’ Christian libertarianism becomes particularly evident. In his essay “Equality” (1943), Lewis affirms the ideal of “democracy”—understood, as David Theroux points out, as “self-government as in Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*”—as “the least bad political structure.”<sup>11</sup> Lewis writes, “I am a democrat because I believe in the Fall of Man.” But he promptly distinguishes himself from democrats whose inspiration for their positions “descends from the ideas of people like Rousseau,<sup>12</sup> who

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<sup>11</sup> David J. Theroux, “C. S. Lewis on Mere Liberty and the Evils of Statism,” 204.

<sup>12</sup> Dyer and Buckley note that in “On the Transmission of Christianity,” in *God on the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 118, “Lewis referred to Rousseau as the ‘father of the totalitarians’” (p. 97).

believed in democracy because they thought mankind so wise and good that everyone deserved a share in the government.”<sup>13</sup> Lewis continues:

The danger of defending democracy on those grounds is that they’re not true. And whenever their weakness is exposed, the people who prefer tyranny make capital out of the exposure. I find that they’re not true without looking further than myself. I don’t deserve a share in governing a hen-roost, much less a nation. Nor do most people....The real reason for democracy is just the reverse. Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.<sup>14</sup>

I would argue that Dyer and Watson do not develop this matter sufficiently, but Lewis’ emphasis on human fallenness is at the very heart of any claims one may make for Lewis falling within the Christian classical liberal/libertarian position, a subject I will address later in this essay.

#### *Lewis Against Theocratic and Technocratic Totalitarianism*

Later in chapter 5, Dyer and Watson compare Lewis’ classical liberal beliefs with those of John Locke, who believed that government’s role should be limited to “the protection of individual natural rights” (p. 89-90). Locke grounded human rights in the natural law tradition as expressed by Hooker, but, significantly, Locke deemphasized “government’s perfecting role” (p. 90). Similarly, Lewis, who wrote favorably of Locke, believed that strongly limiting government would protect against the tyrannizing impulse endemic in theocracies on one hand and secularist, statist programs for human perfection on the other. Lewis’ discussion of both such governmental systems is instructive. In his

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<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Equality,” in *Present Concerns*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 17.

<sup>14</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Equality,” 17. I quote this essay somewhat more than do Dyer and Buckley.

posthumously published essay “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” likely written in late 1946, Lewis explains his aversion to theocracy, using terminology that recalls his diction in “Equality”:

I am a democrat because I believe that no man or group of men is good enough to be trusted with uncontrolled power over others. And the higher the pretensions of such power, the more dangerous I think it both to the rulers and to the subjects. Hence Theocracy is the worst of all governments...the inquisitor who mistakes his own cruelty and lust of power and fear for the voice of Heaven will torment us infinitely because he torments us with the approval of his own conscience and his better impulses appear to him as temptations. And since Theocracy is the worst, the nearer any government approaches to Theocracy the worse it will be.<sup>15</sup>

It is striking that “Equality,” written a year after the conclusion of World War II, addresses with such vehemence the seemingly obsolete category of theocracy. But we must consider the larger historical context. Indeed, writing in 1944 in the Preface to *Omnipotent Government*, Ludwig von Mises discusses the “theocratical justification of dictatorship” offered by the “fanatical advocate of Nazism” Werner Sombart, who “was bold enough to assert that the Fuhrer gets his orders from God, the supreme Fuhrer of the universe, and that Fuhrertum is a permanent revelation.”<sup>16</sup> And the matter of Nazism and other totalitarian governments being theocratic in nature was something that Lewis himself explicitly

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<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis, “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” in *On Stories and other Essays on Literature*, 75-76. My quotation of this article is more extensive than what Dyer and Watson quote. Lewis wrote this essay in reply to an article published by the Marxist biologist J.B.S. Handrane, whose article “Auld Hornie, F.R.S.,” *Modern Quarterly* (Autumn 1946): 32-40, criticizes Lewis’ Space Trilogy “for being anti-science and against a ‘planned world’” (I quote David J. Theroux, “C. S. Lewis on Mere Liberty and the Evils of Statism,” 204).

<sup>16</sup> Ludwig von Mises, *Omnipotent Government: The Rise of the Total State and Total War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944), iii. Mises refers to Sombart’s *Deutscher Sozialismus* (Charlottenburg: Buchholz & Weisswange, 1934), 213.

pondered. In this same essay, Lewis writes of “the emergence of ‘the party’ in the modern sense—the Fascists, Nazis, or Communists.” Noting the religious characters of these “Parties,” Lewis writes of “the belief that the process which the Party embodies is inevitable, and the belief that the forwarding of this process is the supreme duty and abrogates all ordinary moral laws.” When Party members embrace this mentality, they “can become devil-worshippers in the sense that they can now *honour*, as well as obey, their own vices...[W]hen cruelty, envy, and lust of power appear as the commands of a great super-personal force...they can be exercised with self-approval.”<sup>17</sup> In the final, unfinished paragraph of this same essay, Lewis writes, “It is, at present, in their sense of serving a metaphysical force that the modern ‘Parties’ approximate most closely to religions.” Lewis mentions “Odinism in Germany” and “the cult of Lenin’s corpse in Russia” before his manuscript ends.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter 5 also addresses Lewis’ concern about the tyrannizing impulse endemic in secularist, statist programs for human perfection. In his July 20, 1958 *Observer* article entitled “Willing Slaves of the Welfare State,” Lewis reveals that his present concern is less with theocracy but rather what Dyer and Watson call “scientific technocracy” (p. 95). Lewis writes:

I dread government in the name of science. That is how most tyrannies come in. In every age the men who want us under their thumb, if they have any sense, will put forward the particular pretension which the hopes and fears of that age render most potent. They “cash in.” It has been magic, it has been Christianity. Now it will certainly be science.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> C. S. Lewis, “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” 78-79.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 79. Editor Walter Hooper suggests that Lewis “probably lost” the essay “soon after” he wrote it.

<sup>19</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Is Progress Possible?: Willing Slaves to the Welfare State,” in *God on the Dock*, 315. An example of such hope in scientific planning and human progress can be seen in Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York:

Significantly, however, we should note that Lewis recognized that totalitarian government could simultaneously be both theocratic and technocratic in nature. Writing in “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” Lewis asserts, “Under modern conditions any effective invitation to Hell will certainly appear in the guise of scientific planning—as Hitler’s regime in fact did.”<sup>20</sup> He continues:

Every tyrant must begin by claiming to have what his victims respect and to give what they want. The majority in most modern countries respect science and want to be planned. And, therefore, almost by definition, if any man or group wishes to enslave us it will of course describe itself as “scientific planned democracy.”<sup>21</sup>

Lewis’ dread of statist “scientific planning” finds a parallel with Mises’ and F.A. Hayek’s various critiques of economic planning.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, although Lewis never went into the kind of analytical detail of the aforementioned economists, Lewis certainly recognized the danger of state “planning” within various sorts of totalitarian states, be they controlled by “Fascists, Nazis, or Communists.”

### *Human Nature and the Perils of Democracy*

But for all his concern regarding totalitarianism in its different forms, Lewis was also pointedly suspicious even of democracy, a suspicion again based in his recognition of fallen human nature. Dyer and Watson do not offer a sustained discussion of Lewis’ critique of democracy, but as

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Harper and Brothers, 1944), who writes, “We have today in social science a greater faith in the improbability of man and society than we have ever had since the Enlightenment” (1024).

<sup>20</sup> C. S. Lewis, “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” 74.

<sup>21</sup> C. S. Lewis, “A Reply to Professor Haldane,” 74-75.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Mises’ and Hayek’s respective contributions in *Collectivist Economic Planning*, ed. F. A. Hayek (1935. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

Theroux points out, “Lewis fully understood that democracy, if unchecked, becomes egalitarianism and will trample on liberty as a collectivist force for evil by celebrating pride and envy as it fosters tyranny.” Indeed, such evil has taken place “even in the supposed pursuit of liberty.”<sup>23</sup> Theroux highlights how Lewis articulates his suspicion through the demon Screwtape in “Screwtape Proposes a Toast” (1959). Screwtape opines:

Hidden in the heart of this striving for Liberty there was also a deep hatred of personal freedom. That invaluable man Rousseau first revealed it. In his perfect democracy, only the state religion is permitted, slavery is restored, and the individual is told that he has really willed (though he didn’t know it) whatever the Government tells him to do. From that starting point, via Hegel (another indispensable propagandist on our side), we easily contrived both the Nazi and the Communist state. Even in England we were pretty successful. I heard the other day that in that country a man could not, without a permit, cut down his own tree with his own axe, make it into planks with his own saw, and use the planks to build a tool shed in his own garden.<sup>24</sup>

Screwtape goes on to explain that tyranny can be brought about by “democracy and egalitarianism,”<sup>25</sup> fostering a system of self-righteous indignation against the more successful members of society and insidious coddling of the indolent:

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<sup>23</sup> David J. Theroux, “C. S. Lewis on Mere Liberty and the Evils of Statism,” 206. See also Steven Gillen, “C. S. Lewis and the Meaning of Freedom,” 265-67, who connects Lewis with classical liberals like Benjamin Constant and F. A. Hayek, over and against Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as one who, though favoring democracy, fears that “increasing political freedom without checks and balances on the will of the masses would merely replace tyranny of the few with what Mill and others called the tyranny of the majority” (266).

<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 121-22.

<sup>25</sup> David J. Theroux, “C. S. Lewis on Mere Liberty and the Evils of Statism,” 206.

*Democracy* is the word with which you must lead [humans] by the nose. The good work which our philological experts have already done in the corruption of the human language makes it unnecessary to warn you that they should never be allowed to give this word a clear and definable meaning. They won't. It will never occur to them that democracy is properly the name of a political system, even a system of voting, and that this has only the most remote and tenuous connection with what you are trying to sell them...

You are to use the word [democracy] purely as an incantation; if you like, purely for its selling power. And of course it is connected with the political ideal that men should be equally treated. You then make a stealthy transition in their minds from this political ideal to a factual belief that all men *are* equal. Especially the man you are working on. As a result you can use the word *democracy* to sanction in his thought the most degrading (and also the least enjoyable) of all human feelings. You can get him practice, not only without shame but with a positive glow of self-approval, conduct which, if undefended by the magic word, would be universally derided.

The feeling I mean is of course that which prompts a man to say *I'm as good as you...*

Now, this useful phenomenon is itself by no means new. Under the name of Envy it has been known to the humans for thousands of years. But hitherto they always regarded it as the most odious, and also the most comical of vices. Those who were aware of feeling it felt it with shame; those who were not gave it no quarter in others. The delightful novelty of the present situation is that you can sanction it—make it respectable and downright laudable—by the incantatory use of the word *democratic...*

[Within the "educational system"], dunces and idlers must not be made to feel inferior to intelligent and industrious pupils. That would be "undemocratic."...All incentives to learn and all penalties for not learning will vanish...And anyway the teachers—or should I say



nurses?—will be far too busy reassuring the dunces and patting them on the back to waste any time on real teaching....Of course, this would not follow unless all education became state education. But it will. That is part of the same movement. Penal taxes, designed for that purpose, are liquidating the Middle Class, the class who were prepared to save and spend and make sacrifices in order to have their children privately educated.<sup>26</sup>

I quote Screwtape’s speech at length to demonstrate Lewis’ prescience in recognizing not only the way envy can undermine the virtues of a democracy but also how such envy, combined with the entitlements of an ever-expanding welfare state and its inevitable perversion of language itself, can serve to squelch individual initiative and achievement, curtail the influence of parents, and corrupt our very understanding of what is moral and immoral.

In his essay, Gillen points out another of Lewis’ concerns about the welfare state, stating that “Lewis regarded welfare guaranteed by the state as a form of control by the state and considered private property to be an indispensable safeguard against that control.”<sup>27</sup> Gillen quotes “Willing Slaves of the Welfare State”:

I believe a man is happier, and happy in a richer way, if he has ‘the freeborn mind’. But I doubt whether he can have this without economic independence, which the new society is abolishing. For economic independence allows an education not controlled by Government, and in

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<sup>26</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 122, 123, 125, 126. See also Lewis’ December 8, 1959 letter to American journalist Dan Tucker, in *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, where Lewis writes, “democracy in the end always destroys education” (p. 1105). Significantly, and to their book’s detriment, Dyer and Watson offer only passing reference to Screwtape’s speech and do not quote any of it.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Gillen, “C. S. Lewis and the Meaning of Freedom,” 264.

adult life it is the man who needs, and asks, nothing of Government who can criticize its acts and snap his fingers at its ideology.<sup>28</sup>

This passage demonstrates Lewis' far-ranging understanding of liberty, for here he explicitly recognizes that economic freedom goes hand in hand with other liberties, and that government control of the economic realm enables government to control various other facets of citizens' lives. Gillen rightly notes that "Lewis' views were congruent with those of Hayek, who warned in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), 'Economic control is not merely control of a sector of human life which can be separated from the rest; it is the control of the means for all our ends.'"<sup>29</sup>

### *Divorce, Homosexuality, and the Nanny State*

Returning to Dyer and Watson's book, we see that chapter 6, "Screwtape is in the Details," develops the concerns of the previous chapter, affirming that "The strength of Lewis' commitment to a transcendent moral reality might be rivaled only by his distrust of government's ability to determine, enforce, and encourage that same morality" (p. 116). Especially significant in this regard is Lewis' belief that government should not criminalize sinful behavior as long as it does not directly harm others. He also did not believe it right for Christians to advocate legislation that would impose Christian morality upon unbelievers. Specifically, in *Mere Christianity* (1952), Lewis "distinguish[es] between the Christian and secular views of marriage" (p. 115). In reading Lewis' views below, we should remember that divorce was until 1969 generally illegal in the UK:

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<sup>28</sup> C. S. Lewis, "Is Progress Possible? Willing Slaves of the Welfare State," in *God on the Dock*, 314.

<sup>29</sup> Steven Gillen, "C. S. Lewis and the Meaning of Freedom," 264. Gillen quotes F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 92.

I should like to distinguish two things which are very often confused. The Christian conception of marriage is one: the other is the quite different question—how far Christians, if they are voters or members of Parliament, ought to try to force divorce laws. A great many people seem to think that if you are a Christian yourself you should try to make divorce difficult for everyone. I do not think that. At least I know I should be very angry if the Mohammedans tried to prevent the rest of us from drinking wine. My own view is that the Churches should frankly recognise that the majority of the British people are not Christians and, therefore, cannot be expected to live Christian lives. There ought to be two distinct kinds of marriage: one governed by the State with rules enforced on all citizens, the other governed by the Church with rules enforced by her on her own members. The distinction ought to be quite sharp, so that a man knows which couples are married in a Christian sense and which are not.<sup>30</sup>

Here we may see that Lewis affirms libertarian principles of individual choice and free association as he distinguishes not merely between Christian marriage and secular marriage, but also between the appropriate purviews of church authority and state authority. Significantly, in his distaste for Christians using the state to enforce their morality on non-Christians, he also affirms the need for the church to enforce Christian morality upon its members—who, it is worth emphasizing, have *chosen* to attach themselves to the church and thus submit to its government.

Dyer and Watson also highlight how Lewis distinguished between the morality of male homosexual behavior—which was not decriminalized in the UK until after Lewis’ death—and its criminalization. On one hand, Lewis wrote to Sheldon Vanauken in 1954, “I take it for certain that the *physical* satisfaction of homosexual desires is a sin.”<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Lewis was adamant about the government not punishing homosexual

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<sup>30</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 101-102.

<sup>31</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 3:471.

acts. In a 1959 letter in which Lewis expresses compassion for “persecuted” homosexuals, he writes, “I quite agree with you about Homosexuals: to make the thing criminal cures nothing and only creates a blackmailers’ paradise. Anyway, what business is it of the State?”<sup>32</sup> And addressing the matter of homosexuality in a 1958 letter, Lewis writes:

[N]o *sin*, simply as such, should be made a *crime*. Who the deuce are our rulers to enforce their opinion of sin on us?—A lot of professional politicians, often venal time-servers, whose opinion on a moral problem in one’s life we shd. attach very little value to. Of course many acts which are sins against God are also injuries to our fellow-citizens, and must on that account, but only on that account, be made crimes. But of all the sins in the world I shd. have thought homosexuality was the one that least concerns the State. We hear too much of the State. Government is at best a necessary evil. Let’s keep it in its place.<sup>33</sup>

Lewis’ discussion of homosexuality here reveals his larger distinction between sin and crime. In Lewis’ words, crimes must need be “injuries to our fellow-citizens.” Dyer and Watson observe that Lewis’ “perhaps libertarian” argument “falls well within the classical natural law tradition” (p. 113). They quote the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas:

Human law is framed for the mass of men, the majority of which are not perfectly virtuous. Therefore human law does not prohibit every vice from which the majority can abstain, and especially those that harm others and must be prohibited for human society to survive, such as homicide, theft, and the like.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:1154.

<sup>33</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, rev. ed., ed. Warren Lewis (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 2003), 473.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1914-1938) I-II, Q. 96, A. 2. Steven Gillen, “C. S. Lewis and the Meaning of Freedom,” 265, makes this same point.

*Lewis, Mill, and the “Harm Principle”*

Dyer and Watson also compare Lewis’ basic philosophy of limited government interference with John Stuart Mill’s “harm principle” as expressed in *On Liberty* (1859). They quote Mill as follows:

[T]he sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forebear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise or even right...The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.<sup>35</sup>

Dyer and Watson’s connection between Lewis and Mill is helpful, but we should be wary of taking the parallel between them too far. First, although Dyer and Watson claim that Lewis “borrows the harm principle from Mill” (p. 121), they offer no explicit evidence that Lewis’ position was directly influenced by Mill. (Indeed, as Dyer and Watson acknowledge, Adam Barkman has concluded, based on Lewis’ marginalia of Mill’s writings, “that Mill was wrong ‘about nearly everything’” [118].<sup>36</sup>) Second, as Gillen points out, Lewis in “Man or Rabbit” (c. 1946), though describing

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<sup>35</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/The World’s Classics, 1991), 14. Dyer and Watson mistakenly quote this as two separate paragraphs without ellipses.

<sup>36</sup> Adam Barkman, *C. S. Lewis and Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Allentown, PA: Zossima Press, 2009), 447.

Mill as “good,” “could not accept the atheistic teleological morality underlying Mill’s notion of freedom.”<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, Mill, unlike Lewis, does not make the sharp distinction between the authority of the state and the authority of the church or, for that matter, any institution that the individual has aligned him or herself with through the principle of free association. Rather, although the introductory chapter of *On Liberty* that Dyer and Watson quotes focuses on the matter of state coercion, Mill in that same chapter writes against the influence of “religion” which, despite the modern “separation between spiritual and temporal authority,” exerts its powerful influence upon “the formation of moral feeling”; Mill also criticizes “churches and sects” (as well certain non-Christian “modern reformers”) for “their assertion of the right of spiritual domination.”<sup>38</sup> Significantly, Mill explicitly states the “one very simple principle” which guides *On Liberty* is that “society” should not practice “compulsion and control” against “the individual,” “whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion.”<sup>39</sup> Clearly Mill would disagree with Lewis’ belief that churches should correct and even discipline its members for heterodox beliefs and sinful behavior; and although Lewis, as we have seen, agreed that churches and even individual Christians should not inappropriately exert legal influence on moral issues, he still encouraged Christians to exercise moral influence both within the churches and the broader society in ways that Mill would find distasteful and even objectionable.

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<sup>37</sup> Steven Gillen, “C. S. Lewis and the Meaning of Freedom,” 262. Gillen also notes, regarding matters of economic liberty, that Lewis’ “instrumental reasoning,” while seeming on some level “to mimic Mill,” is actually “unlike Mill” in that “Lewis ascribed intrinsic value to liberty and traced that value to natural law, which was given by the Creator and supersedes laws given by the state” (264). Much like Dyer and Watson do seven years later, Gillen traces this Christian natural law influence upon Lewis from Aquinas, Richard Hooker, Hugo Grotius (whom Dyer and Watson do not mention), and John Locke.

<sup>38</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Other Essays*, 18.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

*The Violation of Natural Law in Lewis’ Space Trilogy*

Dyer and Watson’s concluding chapter, “Politics in the Shadowlands,” analyzes how the concepts Lewis articulated in *The Abolition of Man* manifest themselves in Lewis’ Space Trilogy, a vehicle by which Lewis articulated “belief in Christianity and the moral law...to a skeptical culture” (p. 144). In the first two novels of the trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938) and *Perelandra* (1943), the villain Weston carries out the agenda of *Abolition’s* “nameless innovator.” In *Out of the Silent Planet*, Weston “takes the legitimate value of human posterity and warps it beyond recognition by subjecting all other values to it” (p. 138). In *Perelandra*, Weston’s agenda transforms into “an infinite perpetuation” of a kind of sinister all-encompassing spirituality (p. 139). And in *That Hideous Strength*, the leaders of the N.I.C.E. seek to bring about the post-human world Lewis warned of in *Abolition*. Dyer and Watson’s discussions of Lewis’ fiction are brief, but their observations are valuable in themselves even as they encourage future analysis by other scholars.

*The Limitations of Dyer and Watson’s Study*

Throughout their book, Dyer and Watson effectively examine the sweep of Lewis’ writings—covering his books of Christian apologetics, periodical essays, novels, letters, and literary criticism—to demonstrate his consistent articulation of natural law and, albeit stated less frequently, classical liberal beliefs. My reservations with their book concern matters of omission more than commission. In the pages that follow, I will discuss certain matters that Dyer and Watson’s comparatively short book does not address. I do this not to criticize their efforts but rather to extend the discussion to which they have offered such a substantial contribution.

Before I move on to those topics, however, I will mention my disappointment that Dyer and Watson all but ignore the articles by Gillen

and Theroux that I cite throughout this present essay. Gillen and Theroux each valuably address various topics that Dyer and Watson explore, but their book only mentions Theroux's essay once in passing, and it does not mention Gillen's contribution. This failure to engage with Gillen and Theroux is perplexing to me because both authors anticipate, some years prior, Dyer and Watson's insights, and in fact address several important matters that Dyer and Watson ignore altogether. Indeed, I recommend that readers interested in understanding Lewis' classical liberal/libertarian viewpoints first read Gillen's and Theroux's articles—both available free online—before they proceed to Dyer and Watson's book.

#### **IV. LEWIS CONSIDERED WITHIN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTARIANISM**

##### *Madison, Bastiat, and Tocqueville*

Moving beyond the parameters of Dyer and Watson's book, I will now discuss how our understanding of Lewis' libertarianism may be enhanced as we examine how Lewis' ideas connect with the broader stream of Christian classical liberal/libertarian thinking that preceded him in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. As noted earlier, Dyer and Watson do an admirable job recognizing the Christian natural law influence upon Lewis from Aquinas, Hooker, and the broadly Christian Locke, but they stop at Locke and then make the aforementioned speculative and not entirely satisfying connection with the agnostic Mill. As we consider ways to further study Lewis' political ideas, we may profit by examining how Lewis' ideas intersect with other thinkers in the Christian classical liberal/libertarian tradition.

I will offer five examples, the first three being thinkers whose ideological connections with Christianity have been established but whose own Christian belief and practice have been the subject of some dispute. The first is James Madison (1751-1836). Michael Novak writes that



“there can be no doubt that [Madison’s] world view is no other than Christian...[W]hile it does not affirm everything that orthodox Christian faith affirms, Madison’s vision is sufficiently impregnated with Christian faith to be not only unconvincing, but *unintelligible* without it.”<sup>40</sup> Particularly relevant to Lewis is how Madison, who was mentored at Princeton by the Scots Presbyterian Calvinist John Witherspoon, based his belief in a federalist political system, with its many checks and balances, upon his belief in human moral imperfection. In Federalist 51, Madison writes that because of “human nature,” men are not “angels,” and therefore “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition.”<sup>41</sup> Madison’s affirmations here relate to Lewis’ statement that he believed in limited government because he believed in the Fall of humanity.

Similarly, Lewis’ understanding of how corrupted human nature necessarily corrupts government leaders resembles that of the nineteenth-century French Catholic liberal Frédéric Bastiat (1801-50),<sup>42</sup> who writes in *The Law*:

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*, expanded ed. (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003), 139. For a discussion of Madison’s religious beliefs and his theology of religious freedom, see Vincent Phillip Munoz, “Religion in the Life, Thought, and Presidency of James Madison,” in *Religion and the American Presidency*, 2nd ed., ed. Mark J. Rozell and Gleaves Whitney (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 51-72.

<sup>41</sup> James Madison, Federalist 51, in Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist*, the Gideon Edition, ed. George W. Carey and James McCellan (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2001), 268-69.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Skousen, *The Making of Modern Economics: The Lives and Ideas of Great Thinkers*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), writes that Bastiat “was a strong believer in the Catholic faith” (62); David Todd, *Free Trade and Its Enemies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), calls Bastiat “A devout Catholic” (p. 192); and Charles Kaupé, “Bastiat’s Vision,” *Action Institute Powerblog*, June 29, 2012, writes that “Bastiat drew on his Catholic faith and the writings of Adam Smith and John Locke to articulate a vision of limited, efficient government.” But an alternative understanding is offered by the entry on Bastiat in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (accessed at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02345b.htm>), which states that Bastiat “was fitted to understand and defend Catholic truth, but the prejudices in the midst of which he lived kept him aloof from the Faith until the very eve of his death.”

If the natural tendencies of mankind are so bad that it is not safe to permit people to be free, how is it that the tendencies of these organizers are always good? Do not the legislators and their appointed agents also belong to the human race? Or do they believe themselves to be made of finer clay than the rest of mankind?<sup>43</sup>

Another significant connection between Lewis and the historical sweep of Christian classical liberalism can be seen between Lewis and Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59), specifically concerning Lewis' critique of envy within democracy as articulated in "Screwtape Proposes a Toast." The matter of envy within democracy was a danger that Tocqueville—whose political philosophy was largely dependent on Christianity<sup>44</sup>—addressed well before the advent of the welfare state. Richard Swedberg observes:

To Tocqueville, envy was inherent in democracy. "Envy," he wrote [in *Democracy in America*], "is a feeling that develops strongly among equals; and that is why it is so ardent in democratic times." In addition, "the desire for equality becomes ever more insatiable as the degree of

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<sup>43</sup> Frédéric Bastiat, *The Law*, trans. Dean Russell, forward Walter E. Williams, introduction Richard Ebeling, afterward Sheldon Richman (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Foundation for Economic Education, 1998), 63. I draw my comparisons between Lewis and Madison and Bastiat from my "Was C. S. Lewis a Libertarian?," paragraphs 8-9.

<sup>44</sup> For discussions of both Tocqueville's philosophical dependence on Christianity as well as his own strained relationship with the Catholic church, see Doris S. Goldstein, "The Religious Beliefs of Alexis de Tocqueville," *French Historical Studies* 1.4 (Autumn 1960): 379-93; and Luk Sanders, "The Strange Belief of Alexis de Tocqueville: Christianity as Philosophy," *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 74.1 (2013): 33-53. Goldstein argues that although Tocqueville could not "accept those doctrines which would have made him a member of the Roman Catholic Church" (393), "his belief may truly be called 'Christian'" (392). Sanders argues instead that "Christianity was Tocqueville's philosophical belief, rather than his religious belief" (33).

inequality increases”—with a corresponding rise in desire to own the same things as others have.<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, Tocqueville believed that Christianity could mitigate the human impulse toward envy that democracy exacerbated. In the words of Joshua Mitchell, Tocqueville suggested that Christianity was “palliative for envy and difference,” believing that “there must be an orientation toward the transcendent if the temptations of the world are to be ameliorated” and that “only a (creator) God may draw the (created) soul away from the comparative and toward the absolute. As social conditions become ever more equal, the need for God becomes ever more acute.” Mitchell specifically quotes Tocqueville’s statement in *Democracy in America* that “religion places the object of man’s desires outside and beyond worldly goods and naturally lifts the soul into regions far above the realm of the senses.”<sup>46</sup> Certainly Tocqueville’s understanding of these matters can illuminate our understanding of why Lewis’ Screwtape would seek to obfuscate his and his fellow demons’ victims’ Christianity in his attempt to encourage—by means of exciting their envy—an idolatrous reverence for democracy and equality.

#### *Lord Acton*

Fruitful connections may also be seen between Lewis and the prominent 19<sup>th</sup>-century Christian classical liberal Lord Acton (John Emerich Edward Dalberg, 1834-1902), who was without dispute devoutly Catholic. Most obviously, we may see how Lewis’ distrust of human nature and human power may be compared to Acton’s famous maxim,

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Swedberg, *Tocqueville’s Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 21.

<sup>46</sup> Joshua Mitchell, *Tocqueville on Religion, Democracy, and the American Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 183, 187.

“Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”<sup>47</sup> And this comparison is particularly germane when we examine the context of Acton’s maxim, which appears within a letter to Church of England Archbishop Mandell Creighton that spoke to the need for historians to accurately judge past popes for their abuses and corruption.<sup>48</sup> Significantly, Creighton in his three-volume history of the Renaissance popes “appeared to suggest that because of [these popes’] great office and heavy responsibility they should be judged less harshly for their moral imperfections.”<sup>49</sup> Responding to Creighton’s position, Acton—whose earlier opposition to the doctrine of Papal Infallibility (codified by the Catholic Church in 1870) was grounded in his distrust of human nature in its exercise of extreme power—writes:

I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favourable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way against holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility [the responsibility of historians] has to make up for the want of legal responsibility [the lack of legal condemnation of such rulers while they lived]. Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> John Emerich Edward Dalberg, Lord Acton, “Letter I” (Cannes, April 5, 1887), in *Acton-Creighton Correspondence*. Accessed at <[http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/acton-acton-creighton-correspondence#lf1524\\_label\\_010](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/acton-acton-creighton-correspondence#lf1524_label_010)>, paragraph 22.

<sup>48</sup> Oliver H. Richardson, “Lord Acton and His Obiter Dicta on History,” *The Sewanee Review* 13.2 (April 1905), writes that Acton’s “opinion of human nature, as revealed in history, is low” (p. 132).

<sup>49</sup> David Lee, “The Wisdom of Lord Acton,” *Sophia* 103 (Easter 2012), 10.

<sup>50</sup> John Emerich Edward Dalberg, Lord Acton, “Letter I,” paragraph 22.

We may surmise that Acton’s influence is evident in Lewis’ statement in “Equality” that “Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Lewis himself approvingly quotes Acton in his address “Membership” (1945), in which Lewis writes, “But since we have learned sin, we have found, as Lord Acton says, that ‘all power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely’.”<sup>52</sup>

Significantly, Acton, like Lewis, was also deeply sensitive to the potential corruption of democracy, with Acton emphasizing how the power democracy gives its practitioners can corrupt them in the same way it has kings. In *The History of Freedom in Antiquity*, Acton writes, “the possession of unlimited power, which corrodes the conscience, hardens the heart, and confounds the understanding of monarchs, exercised its demoralising influence on the illustrious democracy of Athens.”<sup>53</sup> Acton also notes how these same Athenian democrats, believing that “the sovereign people had a right to do whatever was in its power, and was bound by no rule of right or wrong but its own judgment of expediency,” indulged in envy as they “plundered the rich.”<sup>54</sup> Acton concludes that abuses of Athenian democracy serve as a lesson

for all times, for it teaches that government by the whole people, being the government of the most numerous and most powerful class, is an evil of the same nature as unmixed monarchy, and requires, for nearly the same reasons, institutions that shall protect it against itself, and shall uphold the permanent reign of law against arbitrary revolutions of opinion.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Equality,” 17.

<sup>52</sup> C. S. Lewis, “Membership,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 168. Dyer and Watson note Lewis’ quotation of Acton (102) but offer no substantive discussion of Acton.

<sup>53</sup> John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, First Baron Acton, “The History of Freedom in Antiquity” (1877), in *The Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, vol. 1: *Essays in the History of Liberty*, ed. J. Rufus Fears (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 1985), 13.

<sup>54</sup> Acton, “The History of Freedom in Antiquity” 13-14.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

Acton's emphasis on the need for checks and balances within a democracy is germane to Lewis' affirmation in "A Reply to Professor Haldane" that "no man or group of men is good enough to be trusted with uncontrolled power over others"<sup>56</sup> even as it parallels Lewis' warning in "Screwtape Proposes a Toast" of the eviscerating plunder of extreme taxation that takes place within a democracy given to envy.

*J. Gresham Machen*

Finally, we may connect Lewis with the Christian libertarian whose ideas and concerns are arguably most similar to Lewis', his near contemporary J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), a Princeton Seminary professor and later the leading influence behind the founding of both Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.<sup>57</sup> Although I have found no evidence that Lewis was familiar with Machen's writings, the parallels between Lewis and Machen are numerous and worthy of developed scholarly coverage. Here I will only attempt a brief overview.

First, Machen, a thoroughgoing Calvinist who embraced the doctrine of total depravity, was as wary as Lewis, if not more so, of fallen human nature, and his extensive theological writings on human fallenness and sinfulness include warnings against tyranny, totalitarian government, and the loss of liberty.<sup>58</sup> Like Lewis, Machen was specifically concerned about the tyranny of scientific "experts." In *The Christian View of Man* (1937), he writes, "I think the tyranny of experts is the worst and most dangerous

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<sup>56</sup> C. S. Lewis, "A Reply to Professor Haldane," 75.

<sup>57</sup> For discussions of Machen's libertarianism, see Daniel Walker, "J. Gresham Machen: A Forgotten Libertarian," Foundation for Economic Education, December 1, 1993 (online); and Lawrence W. Reed, "J. Gresham Machen: God's Forgotten Libertarian," Foundation for Economic Education, August 28, 2015 (online).

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 209, 226-31.

tyranny that ever was devised” as he discusses the pretense of “the modern advocates of euthanasia” who argue for what they claim “produces happiness and avoids pain for the human race.”<sup>59</sup>

Machen also shared Lewis’ concern regarding state dominance of their respective countries’ educational systems. In *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), Machen criticizes the state’s growing involvement with education, in which “the choice of schools” is “taken away from the individual parent and placed in the hands of the state,” which would, in turn, place children “under the control of psychological experts.”<sup>60</sup> Like Lewis, Machen was gravely concerned about the expanding nanny state seeking to monopolize the education system, a movement Machen directly linked to “tyranny.” In “The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age” (1933), Machen writes that the “worst” aspect of the “centralization of [political] power” is the “monopolistic control of education by the state.” He also writes:

a state-controlled compulsory education has proved far more effective in crushing out liberty than the older and cruder weapons of fire and sword, and modern experts have proved to be more efficient than the dilettante tyrants of the past.<sup>61</sup>

Machen’s concern regarding state tyranny in schooling also prompted Machen to testify before the US congress in 1926 against the proposed federal Department of Education,<sup>62</sup> and in numerous publications he

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<sup>59</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man*, 209, 210. In “Christianity and Liberty” (1931), in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D.G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), Machen also speaks out against the pretense of “Modern scientific utilitarianism” (p. 356).

<sup>60</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923. New York: Macmillan, 1934), 11.

<sup>61</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 165 (January 1933), 39-40.

<sup>62</sup> The transcript of Machen’s testimony before the US Senate Committee on Education and Labor and the House Committee on Education is available as J. Gresham Machen, “Proposed Department of Education,” in *Education, Christianity, and the State*, ed. John W. Robbins

wrote against the 1921 Lusk Laws in New York state, which required that all private schools and teachers be licensed and supervised by the state government.<sup>63</sup>

Parallels between Lewis and Machen are also evident in the distinctions each made between temporal and church authority. Lewis' concerns regarding Christians inappropriately influencing divorce laws in the UK—which, curiously, he articulated in conjunction with stating how upset he would be if Muslims “tried to prevent the rest of us from drinking wine”—can be compared to Machen's disapproval of the Presbytery of New Brunswick's motion to support the Eighteenth Amendment to the US Constitution and the Volstead Act. In his opposition to church-endorsed state-enforced prohibition of alcohol, Machen opposed an ecclesiastical “policy which places the church in its corporate capacity, as distinguished from the activity of its members, on record with regard to such political questions.” He argued that, despite his great “horror of the evils of drunkenness” and “detestation of any corrupt traffic” that seeks to “profit” from “this horrible sin,” it was “clearly the duty of the church”—not the state—“to combat this evil.”<sup>64</sup> Like Lewis, Machen combined his libertarian view of state authority with a firm belief that church government should discipline church members who departed from codified rules of faith and practice. In defending “why as a libertarian he would not allow as much liberty in the church as he would

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(Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1987), 99-123; see also J. Gresham Machen, “Shall We Have a Federal Department of Education?,” in *Education, Christianity, and the State*, 84-97.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 13; “Does Fundamentalism Obstruct Social Progress?” (1924) in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 112; “Shall We Have a Federal Department of Education?,” 92; and “Christianity and Liberty,” 358.

<sup>64</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “Statement on the Eighteenth Amendment” (1926), in *Selected Shorter Writings*, 394. D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 136-37, notes that Machen's support in 1928 of the Catholic, Democratic presidential nominee Al Smith was primarily because of Smith's favoring the repeal of Prohibition.



in the state,”<sup>65</sup> Machen clearly distinguished “between voluntary and involuntary organizations” and between individuals’ voluntary association with the church and their *involuntary* association with the state. He writes, “Insistence on fundamental agreement within a voluntary organization” is logically consistent “with insistence upon the widest tolerance in the state.”<sup>66</sup>

## V. LEWIS AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

As the United States Supreme Court currently considers the case of *Masterpiece Cakeshop vs. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, it is particularly timely to consider how Lewis might respond to contemporary controversies regarding same-sex marriage, a subject that seems highly germane in light of Lewis’ aforementioned statements regarding marriage, divorce, and homosexuality.<sup>67</sup> Certain scholars have speculated on this matter; citing Lewis’ proposal in *Mere Christianity* for a clear distinction between state-governed and church-governed marriages, Lewis scholar Will Vaus has suggested that “Lewis would have approved of [same-sex] civil unions but not gay marriage....I think he would have approved of civil unions for all offered through the state, but Christian marriage offered through the Church only to those willing to meet biblical requirements for marriage.” Norman Horn of the Christian Libertarian Institute, making no mention of civil unions, has suggested that Lewis would propose an approach to same-sex marriage that would emphasize freedom of association and would reflect the distinction between church

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<sup>65</sup> George Marsden, “Understanding J. Gresham Machen,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 11.1 (1990), 57.

<sup>66</sup> J. Gresham Machen, “Does Fundamentalism Obstruct Social Progress?,” 113. Significantly, Machen for twenty years ministered to and personally financially supported Richard Hodges, an elderly alcoholic. See Stephen J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 149.

<sup>67</sup> My discussion of this topic develops significantly what I write in the final three paragraphs of “Was C. S. Lewis a Libertarian?”

and state that Lewis made in *Mere Christianity*.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps significantly, both Vaus and Horn offered their thoughts before the US Supreme Court's 2015 Obergefell vs. Hodges ruling legalized same-sex marriage in all fifty states.

We cannot know precisely how Lewis would have addressed this topic, and one must be cautious in speculation, but I will address a few factors that seem pertinent to Lewis and the matter of same-sex marriage as it has recently evolved and now stands, specifically in the United States.

First, we should recognize that although Vaus' suggestion seems consistent with Lewis' proposed distinction between Christian and secular marriage, this distinction is complicated by the fact that, in the US, various Christian church denominations sanctioned and their ministers officiated same-sex marriages before the state ever officially recognized such marriages. With this fact in mind, I believe that Lewis would likely be more concerned about what he would view as unbiblical marriages within churches than he would be concerned about state legalization of same-sex marriage.

At the same time, recognizing that the institution of same-sex civil unions within the US proved a short-lived middle ground before the Obergefell ruling effectively made it obsolete, we might consider, in light of Lewis' commitment to natural law (which he called the "*Tao*") as articulated in *The Abolition of Man*, that Lewis would be none too sanguine regarding even civil sanctioning of same-sex marriage. I postulate this because, in light of there being before the late twentieth century no recognized historical precedent for or tradition of same-sex marriage in any culture, he would see it as a violation of the *Tao* and the product of

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<sup>68</sup> Will Vaus, "C. S. Lewis on Homosexuality," *The Lamppost*: C. S. Lewis, Narnia, & *Mere Christianity* (May 11, 2012). See Vaus' second comment after his online article. Dr. Norman Horn, "C. S. Lewis on Christian Marriage (in Brief)," *Christian Libertarian Institute* (April 29, 2013).

the kind of moral and linguistic innovation he decries in *Abolition*.<sup>69</sup> And given Lewis’ stated concern about the abuses endemic to those afforded extreme degrees of power, he would probably view the Obergefell ruling, with its turning over of laws codified within dozens of state constitutions, as an example of the kind of abuse of power he critiques in “Equality” and “A Reply to Professor Haldane.” Moreover, Lewis might well consider state recognition of same-sex marriage—with all the attendant bureaucracy and legal enforcements involved in such recognition—to be an example of the state’s ever-growing interference in personal matters, something counter to Lewis’ overall disposition that the state should keep out of things as much as possible.

Despite such likely concerns, in light of growing public support for same-sex marriage, Lewis might finally view the matter as tantamount to the controversies regarding divorce in the UK in his own lifetime, and eventually advocate that orthodox Christians should accept that the majority of the public disagrees with them on the morality of same-sex marriage and stop trying to prevent its legality. In this case, keeping in mind Dyer and Watson’s assertion that, for Lewis, “[t]he first purpose of limited government is to safeguard the sanctity of the Church” (p. 120), Lewis might well defer to the legalization of same-sex marriage under the condition that no church, institution, or individual Christian (or other person of faith) be legally required to participate in or provide services for a same-sex marriage ceremony in violation of conscience. Indeed, for Lewis, who is throughout his books and essays “a firm critic of imposed egalitarianism for *any* reason,”<sup>70</sup> any such legal mandate would be another

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<sup>69</sup> See C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 30-51. In the very recent words of commentator and gay rights advocate Andrew Sullivan, “The Case of the Baker in the Gay Culture War,” *New York Magazine*, December 8, 2017 (online), “Opposition to same-sex marriage has been an uncontested pillar of every major world religion for aeons” (paragraph 2). In his article, Sullivan in fact reluctantly sides with Masterpiece Cakeshop owner Jack Phillips in his lawsuit before the US Supreme Court.

<sup>70</sup> David J. Theroux, “C. S. Lewis on Mere Liberty and the Evils of Statism,” 200.

manifestation of the state tyrannically enforcing morality and violating its appropriate limits.

## **VI. THE NHS CAVEAT, HUMAN SUFFERING, HEALTH CARE, AND CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS**

### *Lewis' Correspondence with Mary Willis Shelburne and the NHS*

Lewis' opposition to imposed egalitarianism notwithstanding, a final matter deserving our examination concerns Lewis' positive comments, made late in his life, regarding Great Britain's National Health Service (NHS).<sup>71</sup> Lewis' remarks appear not in any of his published essays, but rather in several private letters written to Mary Willis Shelburne, an American woman with whom he corresponded some thirteen years (1950-63), writing her more than one hundred letters.<sup>72</sup> Significantly, Shelburne was twice widowed, experienced various health ailments, and, in Walter Hooper's words, "suffered acutely from anxiety about what she should live on."<sup>73</sup> Lewis' comments about the NHS should be seen within the larger context of his generally distrustful attitude toward the British welfare state expressed in his previously quoted 1958 article "Willing Slaves of the Welfare State" and "Screwtape Proposes a Toast," which was originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post* on December 19, 1959.<sup>74</sup> In a January 14, 1958 letter to Shelburne, Lewis writes:

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<sup>71</sup> William Fraatz, "C. S. Lewis and America's Health Care Debate," addresses this matter at length.

<sup>72</sup> See C. S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady*, ed. Clyde S. Kilby (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967) as well as C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Collected Letters*, 3:1718.

<sup>74</sup> See also Lewis' December 8, 1959 letter to journalist Dan Tucker, in *Collected Letters*, 3:1104-05. Briefly discussing Lewis' July 7, 1959 letter to Shelburne, Dyer and Watson write, "Lewis was not doctrinaire about his opposition to the welfare state, but he did insist that it came with a cost and a danger" (p. 103).

The worst of all economies is on necessary medicines, tho’ I quite understand how you are tempted to it. What a pity you haven’t got our National System in America. I wish I could help. I can only continue my prayers.<sup>75</sup>

As Hooper notes, Lewis did later in 1958 arrange for his lawyer, Owen Barfield, “to have [Lewis’] New York lawyers send her money every month.”<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, on July 7, 1959, Lewis, in response to learning of “a very nasty experience” that left Shelburne feeling like she was, in her words, “looking at the face of death,” once again wrote sympathetically of the NHS:

What you have gone through begins to reconcile me to our national Welfare State of which I have said so many hard things. “National Health Service” with free treatment for all has its drawbacks—one being that Doctors are incessantly pestered by people who have nothing wrong with them. But it is better than leaving people to sink or swim on their own resources.<sup>77</sup>

Lewis’ final and most positive remark regarding the NHS is evident in a June 10, 1963 letter to Shelburne, written only five months before his death. He writes:

I am sorry to hear of the acute pain and the various other troubles. It makes me unsay all I have ever said against our English “welfare state,” which at least provides free medical treatment for all.<sup>78</sup>

It might be tempting to dismiss Lewis’ comments to Shelburne as informally and likely quickly written ruminations offered in the context

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<sup>75</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Collected Letters*, 3:914.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:1718; see also footnote on 1004.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:1064.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 3:1429.

of the sufferings of a personal friend, ruminations that should not be equated with formal affirmations of government policy. Obviously, if Lewis had seen fit to publish comments in favor of the NHS, he could have done so and received an ample audience for his efforts. The fact that he chose not to do so is significant. Nonetheless, we ought to consider if the above comments can be reconciled with what seems to be the consistently libertarian Lewis evidenced in the writings we examined earlier.

At the very least, Lewis' above comments regarding the NHS remind us that Lewis, whatever his obvious libertarian leanings, did not endeavor to be an unflinching libertarian; indeed, as we observed early in this essay, Lewis resisted political categorization altogether. Moreover, he warned against the spiritual devastation that could result from Christianity being "valued chiefly because of the excellent arguments it can produce in favour of" a particular political position.<sup>79</sup> Returning to Gillen's statement that Lewis "could rightly" be called "a 'Christian Libertarian,'" we should note that Gillen then immediately points out Lewis' aversion "to substituting for the faith itself 'some Fashion with a Christian colouring.'" Gillen concludes: "Therefore, C. S. Lewis would likely insist that his concept of freedom is *merely Christian*."<sup>80</sup>

### *Human Suffering, Christian Charity, and State-Run Medical Care*

We must remember that Lewis' "concept of freedom" and its attendant need for limited government are rooted in his deep belief in the Fall of humanity. And the doctrine of the Fall emphasizes not merely human evil but also the pain and suffering that necessarily plagues fallen

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<sup>79</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, 39. Similarly, in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis writes: "Most of us are not really approaching the subject [of a Christian society] in order to find out what Christianity says: we are approaching it in the hope of finding support from Christianity for the views of our own party" (p. 87).

<sup>80</sup> Gillen, "C. S. Lewis and the Meaning of Freedom," 272. Gillen quotes *The Screwtape Letters* (1942. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 91.

humanity. And Lewis emphasized the need for Christians to work to alleviate the effects of the fall. He writes in *Mere Christianity* that Christianity believes “that a great many things have gone wrong with the world that God made and that God insists, and insists very loudly, on our putting them right again.”<sup>81</sup> Each of Lewis’ above comments to Shelburne regarding the NHS is made in the context of his deep compassion for her pain and suffering and his desire to aid her. And Lewis would have been particularly sensitive to Shelburne’s situation in light of the suffering and eventual death of his wife, Joy Davidman, who died in July 1960 of the cancer that had plagued her since 1956. Significantly, Davidman’s cancer treatments were covered by the NHS and Lewis recorded no complaints regarding these treatments.<sup>82</sup> His comments should also be considered in the context of Lewis’ own beliefs and practices regarding the Christian obligation to relieve others’ needs through personal generosity. Lewis himself lived under financial strain because he tenaciously maintained a vow to donate all the royalties he earned through his Christian books even as he still had to pay the taxes on royalties he’d already given away.<sup>83</sup> In a portion of *Mere Christianity* (“Christian Behaviour”) originally published in 1943, Lewis also exhorted his Christian readers to practice sacrificial giving:

Charity – giving to the poor – is an essential part of Christian morality: in the frightening parable of the sheep and the goats it seems to be the point on which everything turns. Some people nowadays say that charity ought to be unnecessary and that instead of giving to the poor we ought to be producing a society in which there were no poor to give to. They may be quite right in saying that we ought to produce this kind of society. But if anyone thinks that, as a consequence, you can stop giving in the meantime, then he has parted company with all Christian morality. I do

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<sup>81</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 38.

<sup>82</sup> William Fraatz, “C. S. Lewis and America’s Health Care Debate,” 397.

<sup>83</sup> John Blake, “The C. S. Lewis You Never Knew,” CNN Belief Blog, December 1, 2013, paragraphs 9-13.

not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charities expenditure excludes them. I am speaking now of 'charities' in the common way. Particular causes of distress among your own relatives, friends, neighbors or employees, which God, as it were, forces upon your notice, may demand much more: even to the crippling and endangering of your own position.<sup>84</sup>

This passage and Lewis' own example indicates that Lewis preferred voluntary—and extremely costly—charity over government intervention to relieve want and suffering. But Lewis' words do not exclude the possibility of such humanitarian state intervention. In fact, given that the sweeping social welfare reforms recommended by the 1942 Beveridge Report lay in the background of the second sentence of the above quotation,<sup>85</sup> it is possible that Lewis here indicates an implicit openness to such reforms. Significantly, a few pages earlier, Lewis emphasizes:

Christianity has not, and does not profess to have, a detailed political programme for applying "Do as you would be done by" to a particular society at a particular moment. It could not have. It is meant for all men at all times and the particular programme which suited one place or time would not suit another.<sup>86</sup>

This passage suggests even more forcefully that Lewis maintained an openness regarding what kind of methods a particular society might employ at a particular time to relieve its people's want and suffering, an

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<sup>84</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 86.

<sup>85</sup> William Fraatz, "C. S. Lewis and America's Health Care Debate," 394.

<sup>86</sup> *Mere Christianity*, 82.



openness that could include, if deemed appropriate, the practices of the NHS. We might also speculate, in light of his personal practice of and uncompromising advocacy of sacrificial charitable giving, if Lewis, despite his aforementioned criticism of excessive taxation to benefit state-run schools, was less concerned than many other libertarians with the taxpayer cost—particularly to wealthier individuals—of socialized medicine.

*Lewis and Free-Market Alternatives*

All this being acknowledged, it seems presumptuous to read Lewis’ comments to Shelburne regarding the NHS as an endorsement of the NHS or socialized medicine in general.<sup>87</sup> Rather, they are Lewis’ recognition that, for all his concerns about the Welfare State, the NHS most certainly benefitted many individuals and also would have benefitted Americans in Shelburne’s situation. But it does not logically follow that Lewis believed that socialized medicine was the optimal way to address the health needs to which he, as a compassionate Christian so conscious of the devastating realities of the Fall, was acutely sensitive. And it is likely that his concerns with socialized medicine would only increase in response to state-mandated ethical decisions that manifested themselves after his death. We can imagine, for example, Lewis’ likely revulsion toward the NHS’s now-longstanding practice of providing taxpayer-funded abortions,<sup>88</sup> and we have already discussed Lewis’ abiding distaste for the government meddling that any facet of the welfare state must necessarily promote.

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<sup>87</sup> My thoughts in this section differ from those of William Fraatz, “C. S. Lewis and America’s Health Care Debate,” who in 2012 argues that Lewis would likely “support the Obama health care plan of universal health insurance coverage” (p. 399), adding that Lewis “probably would regard as churlish anyone who disagreed” (pp. 399-400).

<sup>88</sup> Abortion was generally illegal in the UK until 1968, when it became broadly legal and freely provided by the NHS.

Well worth considering is the perspective offered by business professor Harold B. Jones, Jr. in his provocatively titled "C. S. Lewis: Free-Market Advocate." Jones writes that although "Lewis seems never to have thought specifically about the principles of the free market," his opposition to replacing Christian doctrines with Progressive politics, his commitment to principles of reason and logic, his recognition of imperfect human knowledge, his deep distrust of idealistic scientific social engineering, and his realistic understanding of limited resources amid benevolent intentions led Lewis to suspect the larger socialistic project in ways that fundamentally parallel the concerns of the great free-market economists of his day, Mises and Hayek.<sup>89</sup> Jones notes that Lewis "understood that the execution of benevolent intentions requires the expenditure of resources. Since these are in any given moment severely limited, choices must be made."<sup>90</sup> Jones discusses the section of Lewis' "Why I am not a Pacifist" in which Lewis explains the need to choose who to help and who not to help when one has limited abilities and resources.<sup>91</sup> In Lewis' words, "You cannot do simply good to simply Man; you must do this or that good to this or that man. And if you do this good, you can't at the same time do that; and if you do it *these* men, you also can't do it to *those*."<sup>92</sup> Indeed, when we consider Lewis' larger body of work, it seems entirely plausible that Lewis would sympathize with current free-market proposals to help alleviate the seemingly perpetual health care crises of our present day. I believe that Lewis, in keeping with the principles of his other writings, would be attracted to ideas that lowered costs, eliminated bureaucratic interference, and empowered individual patients to obtain quality services at competitive prices. And given Lewis' strong emphasis

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<sup>89</sup> Harold B. Jones, "C. S. Lewis: Free-Market Advocate," Foundation for Economic Education, October 3, 2012, online. Quoted at paragraph 3. See also the other connections between Lewis and Mises and Hayek noted earlier in this essay.

<sup>90</sup> Harold B. Jones, "C. S. Lewis: Free-Market Advocate," paragraph 12.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraphs 12-13. See C. S. Lewis, "Why I am not a Pacifist," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 75-76. This 1940 address was published posthumously.

<sup>92</sup> C. S. Lewis, "Why I am not a Pacifist," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 75.

upon voluntary Christian charity, I believe he would be particularly intrigued by Christian healthcare sharing ministries in which members voluntarily pool together to share medical costs and pray for each other’s needs.<sup>93</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In the end, Lewis’ libertarianism must be viewed in the context of and as a consequence of his thoroughgoing Christianity, particularly his understanding of the Fall of humanity. His distrust of fallen human nature and its consequent abuses of power was too great for him to suffer the machinations of social planners who would believe themselves wiser than the collective wisdom of the ages and impose their sweeping vision upon the larger populace.

Moreover, Lewis’ apparent departure exhibited from the libertarian principles of limited government and voluntary association must be seen in the context of his relentless desire to live out the mandates of sacrificial Christian love over and above any political program. We should recognize that although Lewis’ expertise in and commitment to a Christian natural law philosophy did not extend to Lewis having any kind of a deep understanding of free-market economics, his overall approach to reason and social issues indicates a disposition that would be receptive to properly ordered and efficient free-market solutions that would benefit “the least of these.”

Finally, Lewis’ own model of gracious compassion and personal generosity stands as an enduring legacy and a godly challenge to all Christians who would extol the virtues of voluntary association and giving over and against the mandates of the interventionist state.

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<sup>93</sup> Two popular Christian healthcare sharing ministries are Medi-Share and Christian Healthcare Ministries, both of whose information is available online. Ironically, although I believe Lewis would recommend such ministries to others, his habitual smoking would disqualify Lewis himself from participating in them.