

Politics in C. S. Lewis's Collected Letters

*A 2024 sequel to "C. S. Lewis in Times of Trump" (2020)*¹

www.lewisiana.nl/politics

This anthology from C. S. Lewis's *Collected Letters*² aims to encourage those who seek guidance from Lewis in matters politic to recognize the complexity as well as the wisdom of such guidance as he actually offers. In this respect the present selection of fragments is like its 2020 precursor.

It is different, though, in that this sequel lacks editorial comments or conclusions. And the selection is now restricted to Lewis's letters – a treasure trove of effective writing as rich as the rest of his work. Only one item is a repeat from the 2020 anthology. As an extra, a further set of politically relevant fragments from Lewis's works follows at the end. Each set is given in chronological order.

The selection emerged gradually as one spin-off from the larger job of selecting letters and fragments for a representative one-volume edition of Lewis's letters in Dutch. Hence while it is based on a full re-reading of the three volumes, it is not the result of a special search or preconceived idea and has no pretence to completeness.

Arend Smilde

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¹ www.lewisiana.nl/eslintimesoftrump

² *C. S. Lewis's Collected Letters, edited by Walter Hooper, were published in three volumes in the years 2000, 2002 and 2006. They contain a total of 3,210 letters. Many hundreds of further letters are available in archives, known to exist elsewhere, or found in other publications, and still others keep emerging from unexpected quarters. In 2022 the C. S. Lewis Correspondence Project was launched, aiming at integral online publication of all published and unpublished letters. For an integrated table of the three volumes' contents see www.lewisiana.nl/cl-tableofcontents.*

... a man called Brundrit of Wadham. He is a frequent speaker in the Union and the editor of an “advanced” magazine: that is to say he inclines to the Bolshevik left and doubtless managed to make Optimism a political subject. I am [having won an essay contest on the subject of “Optimism”] very glad to have been able to do even this much towards removing the common reproach that the revolutionaries here have all the brains – indeed it is generally true: the real Tories have nothing but beautiful voices and long banking accounts.

— letter to his father, 29 May 1921
Collected Letters I, page 550

We also read some Beowulf with a very remarkable young woman. She was a farmer’s daughter who got a county scholarship and went up to London getting a good degree in English. Then – and here’s the marvel – she settled down at home again and divides her time between milking the cows & taking occasional pupils, apparently contented in both. That’s what we want, isn’t it? *Emigration* from the uneducated class into ours only swells the intellectual unemployed: but to have education transforming people & yet leaving them with their roots in the earth (which *then* they will be able to appreciate) is the way to make class disappear altogether. She is “remarkable” only in this: otherwise the adjective does her gross injustice for she is exquisitely ordinary – and not at all pretty except with the bonny open air plumpness of her age & class.

— letter to Arthur Greeves, 8 July 1930
Collected Letters I, page 915

I begin to see how much Puritanism counts in your make up (...) All I feel that I can say with absolute certainty is this: that if you ever feel that *the whole spirit and system* in which you were brought up was, after all, right and good, then you may be quite sure that that feeling is a mistake (tho’ of course it might, at a given moment – say, of temptation, be present as the alternative to some far bigger mistake). My reasons for this are 1. That the system denied pleasures to others as well as to the votaries themselves: whatever the merits of *self-denial*, this is unpardonable interference. 2. It inconsistently kept *some* worldly pleasures, and always selected the worst ones – gluttony, avarice, etc. 3. It was ignorant. It could give no “*reason* for the faith that was in it”. Your relations have been found very ill grounded in the Bible itself and as ignorant as savages of the historical and theological reading needed to make the Bible more than a superstition. 4. “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Have they the *marks* of peace, love, wisdom and humility on their faces or in their conversation? Really, you need not *bother* about that kind of Puritanism. It is simply the form which the *memory* of Christianity takes just before it finally dies away altogether, in a commercial community: just as extreme emotional ritualism is the form it takes on just before it dies in a fashionable community.

— letter to Arthur Greeves, 6 December 1931
Collected Letters II, page 23

You are right in supposing that this Sino-Japanese war provides us at last with a political subject in which we are on the same side (...) [M]y main feeling, and yours too, I expect, is an uneasy balance between indignation and the restraining knowledge that we English have of all people most deprived ourself, by our own imperial history, of the right to be indignant. But I don't know why I have let the whole dam thing waste even this much of my letter.

— letter to his brother, 8 April 1932
Collected Letters II, page 67

I might agree that the Allies are partly to blame, but nothing can fully excuse the iniquity of Hitler's persecution of the Jews, or the absurdity of his theoretical position. Did you see that he said "The Jews have *made no contribution to human culture* and in crushing them I am doing *the will of the Lord*." Now as the whole idea of the "Will of the Lord" is precisely what the world owes to the Jews, the blaspheming tyrant has just fixed his absurdity for all to see in a single sentence, and shown that he is as contemptible for his stupidity as he is detestable for his cruelty. For the German people as a whole we ought to have charity: but for dictators, "Nordic" tyrants and so on – well, read the chapter about Mr Savage in the *Regress* and you have my views.

— letter to Arthur Greeves, 5 November 1933
Collected Letters II, page 128

Surely it is natural that I should regard [T. S.] Eliot's work as a very great evil. (...) And (you will forgive me) it is further aggravated for an Englishman by the recollection that Eliot stole upon us, a foreigner and a neutral, while we were at war – obtained, I have my wonders how, a job in the Bank of England – and became (am I wrong) the advance guard of the invasion since carried out by his natural friends and allies, the Steins and Pounds and *hoc genus omne*, the Parisian riff-raff of denationalised Irishmen and Americans who have perhaps given Western Europe her death wound.

—letter to Paul Elmer More, 23 May 1935
Collected Letters II, page 163-164

Fascism and Communism, like all other evils, are potent because of the good they contain or imitate. *Diabolus simius Dei* ["the devil is the ape of God"]. And, of course, their occasion is the failure of those who left humanity starved of that particular good. This does not for me alter the conviction that they are very bad indeed. One of the things we must guard against is the penetration of both into Christianity ((...)). Mark my words: you will presently see both a Leftist and a Rightist pseudo-theology developing – the abomination will stand where it ought not.

— letter to Bede Griffiths, 17 January 1940
Collected Letters II, page 327

When you speak of the “colour and creed nonsense” I want to distinguish. They have surely on both sides got over the creed nonsense by getting over the creed? It is presumably not an unusually charitable Christian and an unusually charitable Mussulman whom one sees drinking together, but simply two men who have both abandoned their creeds and cultures and are now two ordinary standardised, urban, cinema-fed, materialistic, denationalised wops? I am very glad they should get over the colour bar, of course, and I’d be glad if they got *over* the creed bar leaving the creed intact.

Perhaps I’ve got the wrong picture; what do you think? For instance when their wives meet, are the white ones learning chastity and wifely obedience from the Indiennes, or are they teaching them to be b–s and Mrs Hawksbees? Of course one might be tempted to say that even if all this is so, the political and humanitarian gains are very great. But will they be in the long run? I mean, won’t these standardised wops (...) be just as open as Europe to the inroads of Fascism or Communism or any other devil that comes along?

— letter to his brother, 21 January 1940
Collected Letters II, page 328

I have at last, if only for once, seen a university doing what it was founded to do: teaching Wisdom. And what a wonderful power there is in the direct appeal which disregards the temporary climate of opinion – I wonder is it the case that the man who has the audacity to get up in any corrupt society and squarely preach justice or valour or the like *always* wins? After all, the Nazis largely got into power by simply talking the old straight stuff about heroism in a country full of cynics and buggers.

— letter to his brother, 11 February 1940
Collected Letters II, page 346

“A pot is not the less black because it is the kettle that calls it so” seems a maxim which needs quoting very frequently in political and domestic arguments.

— letter to his brother, 3 March 1940
Collected Letters II, page 360-361
(quoting from Dyson & Butt, *Augustans and Romantics* (1940), page 97)

About Spain – after, first, Hitler’s, and, now, Mussolini’s, abandonment of anti-Communism I am prepared for almost anything. There are people in Europe quite depraved enough to stage that whole ceremony without having the slightest belief in Christianity or the slightest intention of treating it as anything more than a bait. Let us hope – and indeed pray – that Franco is not one of them. Even if he is not, he might be sincere in a sense which bodes very ill for us. (...) Mind you, I think the Pope is sound. Something might be done through him to persuade France to put the Christian-Totalitarian issue first, at any rate for the present, and the Papist-Protestant second. Of course I absolutely agree with you that Papistry even of the most ob-

scurantist and persecuting kind would be better (I mean in terms of this world) than the great rebellion of the other force not only against Grace but against Nature.

— letter to his brother, 21 March 1940
Collected Letters II, page 368

I don't know what to think about the present state of the world. The sins on the side of the democracies are very great. I suppose they differ from those on the other side by being less deliberately blasphemous, fulfilling less the condition of a *perfectly* mortal sin. Anyway, the question "Who is in the right" (in a given quarrel) is quite distinct from the question "Who is righteous?" – for the worse of two disputants may always be in the right on one particular issue. It is therefore *not* self righteous to claim that we are in the right now. But I am chary of doing what my emotions prompt me to do every hour; i.e. identifying the enemy with the forces of evil. Surely one of the things we learn from history is that God never allows a human conflict to become unambiguously one between simple good and simple evil?

The practical problem about charity (in our prayers) is very hard work, isn't it? When you pray for Hitler & Stalin, how do you actually teach yourself to make the prayer real? The two things that help me are (a) A continual grasp of the idea that one is only joining one's feeble little voice to the perpetual intercession of Christ, who died for those very men (b) A recollection, as firm as one can make it, of all one's own cruelty wh. might have blossomed, under different conditions, into something terrible. You and I are not, at bottom, so different from these ghastly creatures.

— letter to his brother, 16 April 1940
Collected Letters II, page 391

... *Beyond Politics* by Christopher Dawson. The main argument is too complex to describe, but what interested me was the clarity with wh. he distinguished between the ideal of "Freedom" and the ideal of "Democracy". He points out that strict Democracy as envisaged by Rousseau and to some extent embodied in the French republic, is the assertion of the "general will" or the community life against all individual aberrations: the ideal of Freedom, in the English sense, asserts individual conscience, honour and idiosyncrasy against the claims of the community, and its real parents are English Nonconformity and English Aristocracy. He draws the conclusion that modern Democracy in the strict sense *and* modern Dictatorship are the twin children of the Revolution – both asserting the *community*. It all seems to fit in quite well, doesn't it? That's why there is no exemption for conscientious objectors or even priests in France, while there is in England. Or again, the Whig alliance between great aristocrats and dissenting tradespeople was not quite such a *mariage de convenance* as one used to suppose. It also explains why people like us can feel so keenly about "freedom" (making the world safe for "humourists"!) and much less so about Democracy.

— letter to his brother, 21 April 1940
Collected Letters II, page 398

I am also working on a book sent me to review, *Le Mystère de la poésie* by a professor at Dijon, of which my feeling is “If this is typical of modern France, nothing that has happened in the last three months surprises me” – such a mess of Dadaists, Surrealists, nonsense, blasphemy and decadence, as I could hardly have conceived possible. But one ought to have known for, now that I come to think of it, all the beastliest traits of our intelligentsia have come to them from France.

— letter to his brother, 17 August 1940
Collected Letters II, page 436-437

“...the Church is in danger of confounding those who are also opposed to the main enemy of the moment with her true friends, as the French Catholics did when they clung too hard to the old régime, and the Spanish and Italian Catholics when, out of hatred of Liberalism and fear of Communism, they embraced the Fascists.”

– a passage in George Every’s *Christian Discrimination* (1940),
endorsed by Lewis (“yes, I shd. just think so”) in a letter to Every, 11 December 1940
Collected Letters II, page 456

Now about these animals. I don’t admit that my position is “like saying that the black slave is the only natural negro”. It *would* be like it only if the Negro differed from the white man as much, and in the same way, as beast from man: i.e. if he were irrational. And if this were true (but it is not), I then should say that the well-treated slave was the only natural Negro. But of course I might have to add that most white men had shown themselves unfit to exercise the authority which (if black men were really sub-human) wd. be theirs by nature.

— letter to Evelyn Underhill, 16 January 1941
Collected Letters II, page 459

I said [in *The Problem of Pain*, chapter 9, “Animal Pain”] that everything a man does to a beast is *either* a lawful exercise *or* a sacrilegious abuse of an authority by divine right. I didn’t say which of the things we now see men doing to beasts fall into which class. The robin in a cage and the over-fed Peke are both, to me, instances of the *abuse* of man’s authority, tho’ in different ways. I never denied that the *abuse* was common: that is why we have to make laws (and ought to make a good many more) for the protection of animals.

— letter to Evelyn Underhill, 16 January 1941
Collected Letters II, page 460

[On *the Abolition of Man*] The relation between the Tao and Xtianity is best seen from Confucius’ remark “There may be someone who has perfectly followed the way: but I never heard

of one.” Gaius and Titius were, as you will not be surprised to learn, Australians. Singapore knows what comes of Green Books now.

— letter to Martyn Skinner, 4 March 1943*

Collected Letters II, page 561

*conjectured year as published; should be 1944

The general law is Beneficence. Then come the laws that give certain people a prior claim on your beneficence: people to whom your beneficence is pledged by a promise (Justice), or who have already benefited you (Gratitude), or who are specially weak and pitiable (Mercy) or fellow-citizens (Patriotism) or relatives (Family Affection).

They are all perfectly sound, but the last two must not be allowed to over-ride the others. What I meant in that passage was that Racialism, setting up to be the supreme duty, is the rebellion of one particular moral law against moral law in general.

— letter to Mrs Frank L. Jones, 16 January 1946

Collected Letters II, page 699

I suppose, like me, you often catch yourself grumbling about “this rotten government” and realise we are talking just as our fathers talked.

— letter to Arthur Greeves, 13 May 1946

Collected Letters II, page 710

I am pleased, to the point of being excited, by your suggestion. I have said again and again that what we very badly need is a new, frankly high-brow, periodical *not* in the hands of the Left. I have usually added “If only we cd. find a right-minded capitalist.” Money, I take it, is the first essential.

I entirely agree that it shd. not be specifically Christian, much less Anglican: the Tao (in that sense) is to be the ring fence. In almost all existing periodicals one knows in advance how a certain book will be reviewed: the personal and political bias is no longer even disguised. That is what must be avoided.

— letter to Laurence Whistler, 9 January 1947

Collected Letters II, page 757

Your Leftists [in Italy] – your Sinisters, to put it like that – declare their atheism. Even boast of it. Wolves they are and wolves they are seen to be. *We* [in Britain] endure a pack of wolves, dressed in sheep’s clothing. Of those who work injustice in politics many say they are building the Kingdom of God. Nor do they merely say it, they perhaps believe it. For we do not have the ability to read hearts, and Charity does not ascribe to malice that which can result from simple foolishness and ignorance – it “beareth all things, believeth all things”. To me nothing

in this state of affairs seems more grievous than the struggle against hatred in which we are daily engaged – I will not say the hatred of enemies but of our own people.

— letter (in Latin) to Don Giovanni Calabria, 10 August 1948
Collected Letters II, page 868-869

The “Daily Mail” has been conducting a sort of poll on whether we should accept the Argentine terms or fight it out, and got a thirty to one vote in favour of fighting it out: which I find consoling from the point of view of our national morale.

— letter to Warfield Firor, 6 April 1949
Collected Letters II, page 931

I too am Irish, and entirely sympathize with you about dictation from what in the cant of the day is called “the highest level”: but what do you happy [American] people know about it after all? Try living in “free” England for a bit, and you would realize what government interference can mean! And not only interference, but interference in a “school marm” form which is maddening. For instance, one of our rulers the other day defended rationing, not on the only possible grounds, i.e. the economic, but on the ground that in the old days housewives bought the food which they knew their husbands and families *liked*: whereas now, thanks to the rationing, they are forced to provide their households with “a properly balanced diet”. There are times when one feels that a minister or two dangling from a lamp post in Whitehall would be an attraction that would draw a hard worked man up to London!

— letter to Vera Mathews, 6 April 1949
Collected Letters II, page 932

It isn’t easy to see a future for a country which sprouted into a population far too large for it on the strength of an immense overseas trade and an empire and has largely lost both – just as it’s hard to see a future for Vienna with no Austrian Empire. But the only certain thing about the future is that, whether for better or worse, it is always quite different from what we expect.

— letter to Vera Mathews, 11 July 1949
Collected Letters II, page 957-958

The only laugh in a deplorable business is an interview between one of our Cabinet Ministers and your Mr. Snyder [U.S. secretary of the Treasury]; the former is reported to have said impressively that without a further big dollop of Marshall Aid, the British government would fall – to which Mr. Snyder replied airily that the fall of the present British government would produce no unfavourable repercussions on any section of Congress, and would be hailed with relief by many. Curtain and exeunt omnes!

We are so full of our own troubles that we haven't much time for following yours, and in any case I'm no great newspaper reader; but I gather that my namesake, the miner's leader [John L. Lewis], is a thorn in your flesh. The fact is that only a return to Christianity can save the world, and I'm sure you won't think us ungrateful for American aid if I say that golden ointment for Europe is merely a palliative for the symptoms and not a cure for a deep seated disease.

— letter to Vera Mathews, 5 August 1949
Collected Letters II, page 963

The old Inegalitarian societies had at least this in their favour, that at least *some* of their members (the eldest sons of gentlemen living on inherited land, *and* the agricultural labourers with no chance to rise and therefore no thought of rising) were often really outside the competitive struggle. I have an uneasy feeling that much of the manliness and toughness of the community depended on them. I'm not idealising such societies. The gentry were often bad, the peasantry often (perhaps nearly always) ill treated. I mean only that we haven't solved the problem. Or, generalising this, I find the social problem insoluble. It is "How to extend to all the good life which unequal societies have (sometimes) produced for the few? For the good life as (I suppose) you and I conceive it – independence, calling one's house one's castle, saying "Mind your own business" to impertinent people, resisting bribes and threats *as a matter of course*, culture, honour, courtesy, un-assertiveness, the ease and elbow-room of the mind – all this is no natural endowment of the animal Man, but the fine flower of a privileged class. And because it is so fine a flower it breeds, within the privileged class itself, a desire to equalise, a guilty conscience about their privileges. (At least I don't think the revolt from below has often succeeded, or even got going, without this help from above). But then, the moment you try to spread this good life you find yourself removing the very conditions of it both from the few and from the many, in other words for all. (The simplest case of all is when you say "Here is a beautiful solitude – let us bring charabanc-loads of the poor townsmen to enjoy it": i.e. let it cease to be a beautiful solitude). The many, merely by being the many, annihilate the goals as soon as they reach them (...)

Don't imagine that I am constructing a concealed argument in favour of a return to the old order. I know *that* is not the solution. But what is? Or are we assuming that there must be a solution? Perhaps in a fallen world the social problem can in fact never be solved and we must take more seriously – what all Christians admit in theory – that our home is elsewhere.

— letter to Warfield M. Firor, 12 March 1950
Collected Letters III, page 17-18

I don't see how there could be institutions at all if loyalty was abrogated the moment you didn't like the *personnel*. Of course in the case of temporary and voluntary institutions (say, this College) there is no very acute problem. One is entitled to resign, and resignation of course ends all the duties (and all the privileges) I had as a fellow of it. It is much more

difficult with an institution like a nation. I am sure you don't *in fact* regard all your duties to the U.S.A. as null and void the moment a party or a President you don't like is in power. At what point the policy of one's own country becomes so manifestly wicked that all one's duties to it cease, I don't know. But surely mere disapproval is not enough? One must be able to say, "What the State now demands of me is contrary to my plain moral duty."

— letter to Mrs Frank L. Jones, 6 April 1950

Collected Letters III, page 21-22

If "planning" is taken in the literal sense of thinking before one acts and acting on what one has thought out to the best of one's ability, then of course planning is simply the traditional virtue of Prudence and not only compatible with, but demanded by, Christian ethics. But if the word is used (as I think you use it) to mean some particular politico-social programme, such as that of the present British Govt., then one cd. only say after examining that programme in detail. I don't think I have studied it enough to do that. As for the "planning" involved in your social work I am of course even less qualified. It is certainly *not* wrong to try to remove the natural consequences of sin provided the means by which you remove them are not in themselves another sin. (E.g. it is merciful and Christian to remove the natural consequences of fornication by giving the girl a bed in a maternity ward and providing for the child's keep and education, but wrong to remove them by abortion or infanticide). (...) Where benevolent planning, armed with political or economic power, can become wicked is when it tramples on people's rights for the sake of their good. (...)

— letter to Mary Van Deusen, 7 February 1951

Collected Letters III, page 91

About loving one's country, you raise two different questions. About one, about there seeming to be (now) no *reason* for loving it, I'm not at all bothered. As Macdonald says "No one loves because he sees reason, but because he loves." Or say there are two kinds of love: we love wise & kind & beautiful people because we need them, but we love (or try to love) stupid & disagreeable people because they need us. This second kind is the more divine, because that is how God loves us: not because we are lovable but because He is love, not because He needs to receive but because He delights to give.

But the other question (*what* one is loving in loving a country) I do find v. difficult. What I feel sure of is that the personifications used by journalists and politicians have v. little reality. A treaty between the Govts. of two countries is not at all like a friendship between two people: more like a transaction between two people's lawyers. I think love for one's country means chiefly love for people who have a good deal in common with oneself (language, clothes, institutions) and is in that way like love of one's family or school: or like love (in a strange place) for anyone who once lived in one's home town. The familiar is in itself a ground for affection. And it is good: because any *natural* help towards our spiritual duty of loving is good and God seems to build our higher loves round our merely natural impulses –

sex, maternity, kinship, old acquaintance, etc. And in a less degree there are similar grounds for loving other nations – historical links & debts for literature etc. (hence we all reverence the ancient Greeks). But I wd. distinguish this from the talk in the papers. Mind you, I'm in considerable doubt about the whole thing. My mind tends to move in a world of individuals not of societies.

— letter to Mary Van Deusen, 25 May 1951
Collected Letters III, page 118-119

This is the sort of thing that makes my blood boil. The events at Rollins College [where a third of faculty members were dismissed, presumably because they resisted an innovative teaching method] seem to me to concentrate into one filthy amalgam every tendency in the modern world which I most hate and despise. And, as you say, this kind of thing will put an end to American scholarship if it goes on. Why then did I not cable to an American paper as you suggested? My dear fellow, consider. What could unsolicited advice from a foreigner do except to stiffen the Wagnerian party by enlisting on its side every anti-British and every anti-God element in the state? You are asking me to damage a good cause by what would, from an unauthorised outsider like me, be simply impertinence. In a cooler moment (I don't expect you to be cool at present) you will be thankful I didn't. God help us all. It is terrible to live in a post-civilised age.

— letter to Nathan Comfort Starr, 29 May 1951
Collected Letters III, page 121

I feel greatly obliged to the Prime Minister [Winston Churchill], and so far as my personal feelings are concerned this honour would be highly agreeable. There are always however knaves who say, and fools who believe, that my religious writings are all covert anti-Leftist propaganda, and my appearance in the Honours List would of course strengthen their hands. It is therefore better that I should not appear there. I am sure the Prime Minister will understand my reason, and that my gratitude is and will be none the less cordial.

— Letter to the Prime Minister's secretary, 4 December 1951
Collected Letters III, page 147

Your question about Communists-in-government really raises the whole problem of Democracy. If one accepts the basic principle of Govt. by majorities, how can one consistently try to suppress those problems of public propaganda and getting-into-govt, by which majorities are formed. If the Communists in this country can persuade the majority to sell in to Russia, or even to set up devil-worship and human sacrifice, what is the *democratic* reply? When we said "Govt. by the people" did we only mean "as long as we don't disagree with the people too much"? And is it much good talking about "loyalty"? For on strictly democratic principles I suppose loyalty is obligatory (or even lawful) only so long as the majority want it. I don't

know the answer. Of course there is no question of its being *our* duty (the minority's duty) to obey an anti-God govt. if the majority sets it up. We shall have to disobey and be martyred. Perhaps *pure* democracy is really a false ideal.

— letter to Mary Van Deusen, 21 February 1953
Collected Letters III, page 296

... let us hope he [U.S. president Eisenhower] will not pursue the line of "Godliness for the sake of national strength". We can't use God as a means to any end.

About Democracy and all that. Surely we stand by equality before the Law? If no law disqualifies a man from office, and if he has broken no law, are we entitled to exclude him because we dislike his views? But I don't really know the facts of your situation well enough to apply this.

— letter to Mary Van Deusen, 7 April 1953
Collected Letters III, page 322

About Reverence, you know, I believe all people like us, all who come from a Western, decayed Protestant, liberal, commercial background, have a lot of lee-way to make up. We have our own advantages over those who come from a Latin, Catholic, decayed feudal background: our veracity, manliness, energy. But we are *spiritually ill-bred*: raw & harsh & crude like yokels in a drawing room. How much even of what we take for democratic feeling is really *gaucherie*? i.e. we disapprove of "bowings & scraping" partly because, not having had good dancing masters, we don't know how to bow gracefully. What a pity that the progress of democracy in this country has meant that certain people who used to call me Sir now don't: it ought to have meant that I began calling *them* Sir. And we carry the same boorishness into spiritual matters.

— letter to Mary Van Deusen, 20 May 1954
Collected Letters III, page 477-478

You inflict, as well as suffering, the punishment of Tantalus in your description of your new job. I can't imagine what *sort* of books that library contains. Is it titles like *Seven Ways of Spoiling a Landscape*, *The War Against Agriculture*, *Amenities are Bunk* and *Liberty: Its Cause and Cure*? But I expect you wd. commit the sin of Tantalus if you told me.

— letter to I. O Evans, 10 December 1954
Collected Letters III, page 541

There was a grain of seriousness in my rally against the Civil Service. I don't think you have worse taste or worse hearts than other men. But I do think that the State is increasingly tyrannical and you, inevitably, are among the instruments of that tyranny –

*The weight of Cricchel Down upon your backs,
The blood of Mr. Pilgrim on your heads.*

This doesn't matter for you who did most of your service when the subject was still a freeman. For the rising generation it will become a real problem, at what point the policies you are ordered to carry out have become so iniquitous that a decent man must seek some other profession. I expect you really feel at least as strongly as I do about it.

— letter to I. O. Evans, 20 December 1954
Collected Letters III, page 547

I don't feel that "Sputnik" in itself is anything very dangerous, but one doesn't like the underlying implication, i.e. that its existence proves that Russia is far ahead of your country in inter-continental missiles. But what has alarmed me much more than Sputnik is an article on the behaviour of the American troops in Korea which appeared in a recent *New Yorker*. It is by an American doctor who was out there, and contains some shocking facts; for instance that in the prison camp the Americans threw their own sick comrades out to die in the snow. Let us hope that it is much exaggerated.

— letter to Vera Gebbert, 12 November 1957
Collected Letters III, page 895

The devil about trying to write satire now-a-days is that reality constantly outstrips you. Ought we to be surprised at the approach of "scientocracy"? In every age those who wish to be our masters, if they have any sense, secure our obedience by offering deliverance from our dominant fear. When we fear wizards the Medicine Man can rule the whole tribe. When we fear a stronger tribe our best warrior becomes King. When all the world fears Hell the Church becomes a theocracy. "Give up your freedom and I will make you safe" is, age after age, the terrible offer. In England the omnipotent Welfare State has triumphed because it promised to free us from the fear of poverty.

Mind you, the bargain is sometimes, for a while, kept. A warrior king may really save a tribe from extinction: the Welfare State, at a cost, has come nearer than any society ever did before to giving every man a square meal and a good house to eat it in. The fears from which scientocracy offers to free us are rational ones. We *shall* fairly soon hopelessly overpopulate this planet and that population will be as defective in quality as excessive in quantity. But we cannot trust these New Masters any more than their predecessors. Do you see any solution?

A hundred years ago we all thought that Democracy was it. Neither you nor I probably think so now. It neither allows the ordinary man to control legislation nor qualifies him to do so. The real questions are settled in secret and the newspapers keep us occupied with largely imaginary issues. And this is all the easier because democracy always in the end destroys education. It did so for you sometime ago and is now doing so for us (see a speech of Screw-tape's wh. will soon appear in the *Sat. Evening Post*). I am, you see, at my wit's end on such

matters. Only a power higher than man's can really find a way out. Odd to compare humanity's political inefficiency with its wonderful success in the arts.

— letter to Dan Tucker, 8 December 1959
Collected Letters III, page 1104-1105

... I'm glad you liked the book [*The Four Loves*]. 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? But I couldn't well have had a digression on that. One is fighting on two fronts: *a. For* the persecuted Homo. against snoopers and busybodies. *b. For* ordinary people *against* the widespread freemasonry of the highbrow Homos who dominate so much of the world of criticism and won't be v. nice to you unless you are in their set.

— letter to Delmar Banner, 27 May 1960
Collected Letters III, page 1154

I doubt if I am a Tory. I am much more nearly a political sceptic.

— letter to J. B. Priestley, 18 September 1962
Collected Letters III, page 1371

I loathed and loath Roy Campbell's particular blend of Catholicism and Fascism, and told him so.

— letter to the editor of *Encounter*, January 1963
Collected Letters III, page 1401

Some further political thoughts from C. S. Lewis

¶ from *The Problem of Pain* (1940), chapter 7

... a strong sense of our common miseries, simply as men, is at least as good a spur to the removal of all the miseries we can, as any of those wild hopes which tempt men to seek their realisation by breaking the moral law and prove such dust and ashes when they are realised. If applied to individual life, the doctrine that an imagined heaven on earth is necessary for vigorous attempts to remove present evil, would at once reveal its absurdity. Hungry men seek food and sick men healing none the less because they know that after the meal or the cure the ordinary ups and downs of life still await them. I am not, of course, discussing whether very drastic changes in our social system are, or are not, desirable; I am only reminding the reader that a particular medicine is not to be mistaken for the elixir of life.

Since political issues have here crossed our path, I must make it clear that the Christian doctrine of self-surrender and obedience is a purely theological, and not in the least a political, doctrine. Of forms of government, of civil authority and civil obedience, I have nothing to say. The kind and degree of obedience which a creature owes to its Creator is unique because the relation between creature and Creator is unique: no inference can be drawn from it to any political proposition whatsoever.

¶ from **Dabney Hart**, *Through the Open Door: A New Look at C. S. Lewis* (1984), page 81 (unpublished letter to Michael Lindsay Charlesworth, 9 April 1940)

The subject [political thought], after a little reading, can be practised all day long. Start from your own political views and regard every theory either as a welcome ally or an enemy you'll have to circumvent (that makes you remember them). When you hear people arguing politics, *listen*, and try to see what theories are unconsciously implied in their remarks ("that fellow is a pure Aristotelian though he doesn't know it").

* from "**The Necessity of Chivalry**" (1940)

The medieval ideal brought together two things which have no natural tendency to gravitate towards one another. It brought them together for that very reason. It taught humility and forbearance to the great warrior because everyone knew by experience how much he usually needed that lesson. It demanded valour of the urbane and modest man because everyone knew that he was as likely as not to be a milksop.

In so doing, the Middle Ages fixed on the one hope of the world. It may or may not be possible to produce by the thousand men who combine the two sides of Launcelot's character. But if it is not possible, then all talk of any lasting happiness or dignity in human society is pure moonshine.

...

In the world today, there is a “liberal” or “enlightened” tradition which regards the combative side of man’s nature as a pure, atavistic evil, and scouts the chivalrous sentiment as part of the “false glamour” of war. And there is also a neo-heroic tradition which scouts the chivalrous sentiment as a weak sentimentality, which would raise from its grave (its shallow and unquiet grave!) the pre-Christian ferocity of Achilles by a “modern invocation”. ... These two tendencies between them weave the world’s shroud.

...

In short, there is still life in the tradition which the Middle Ages inaugurated. But the maintenance of that life depends, in part, on knowing that the knightly character is art not nature – something that needs to be achieved, not something that can be relied upon to happen. And this knowledge is specially necessary as we grow more democratic. In previous centuries the vestiges of chivalry were kept alive by a specialized class, from whom they spread to other classes partly by imitation and partly by coercion. Now, it seems, the people must either be chivalrous on its own resources, or else choose between the two remaining alternatives of brutality and softness. This is, indeed, part of the general problem of a classless society, which is too seldom mentioned. Will its *ethos* be a synthesis of what was best in all the classes, or a mere “pool” with the sediment of all and the virtues of none? ... The ideal embodied in Launcelot is “escapism” in a sense never dreamed of by those who use that word; it offers the only possible escape from a world divided between wolves who do not understand, and sheep who cannot defend, the things which make life desirable.

¶ from **Charles Gilmore**, “**To the RAF**”, in Como (ed.), *C. S. Lewis at the Breakfast Table* (1992), page 190, telling about his work with Lewis in the years 1943-1944

[Lewis] thought that if England survived, the Church of the Nation would survive but afterward, that is, after we had won the war, “Can you keep a democracy armed in peacetime?” he asked. No bad observation.

¶ from ***That Hideous Strength*** (1945), chapter 5/1, Miss Hardcastle speaking

“Isn’t it absolutely essential to keep a fierce Left and a fierce Right, both on their toes and each terrified of the other?(...).Any opposition to the N.I.C.E. is represented as a Left racket in the Right papers and a Right racket in the Left papers. If it’s properly done, you get each side outbidding the other in support of us – to refute the enemy slanders. Of course we’re nonpolitical. The real power always is.”

¶ from *Miracles* (1947), chapter 6

The state of affairs in which ordinary people can discover the Supernatural only by abstruse reasoning is recent and, by historical standards, abnormal. All over the world, until quite modern times, the direct insight of the mystics and the reasonings of the philosophers percolated to the mass of the people by authority and tradition; they could be received by those who were no great reasoners themselves in the concrete form of myth and ritual and the whole pattern of life. In the conditions produced by a century or so of Naturalism, plain men are being forced to bear burdens which plain men were never expected to bear before. We must get the truth for ourselves or go without it. There may be two explanations for this. It might be that humanity, in rebelling against tradition and authority, have made a ghastly mistake; a mistake which will not be the less fatal because the corruptions of those in authority rendered it very excusable. On the other hand, it may be that the Power which rules our species is at this moment carrying out a daring experiment. Could it be intended that the whole mass of the people should now move forward and occupy for themselves those heights which were once reserved only for the sages? Is the distinction between wise and simple to disappear because all are now expected to become wise? If so, our present blunderings would be but growing pains. But let us make no mistake about our necessities. If we are content to go back and become humble plain men obeying a tradition, well. If we are ready to climb and struggle on till we become sages ourselves, better still. But the man who will neither obey wisdom in others nor adventure for her himself is fatal. A society where the simple many obey the few seers can live: a society where all were seers could live even more fully. But a society where the mass is still simple and the seers are no longer attended to can achieve only superficiality, baseness, ugliness, and in the end extinction. On or back we must go; to stay here is death.

¶ from *Miracles* (1947), chapter 14

This selective or undemocratic quality in Nature, at least in so far as it affects human life, is neither good nor evil. (...) It permits, on the one hand, ruthless competition, arrogance, and envy: it permits on the other, modesty and (one of our greatest pleasures) admiration. A world in which I was *really* (and not merely by a useful legal fiction) “as good as everyone else,” in which I never looked up to anyone wiser or cleverer or braver or more learned than I, would be insufferable. The very “fans” of the cinema stars and the famous footballers know better than to desire that! What the Christian story does is not to instate on the Divine level a cruelty and wastefulness which have already disgusted us on the Natural, but to show us in God’s act, working neither cruelly nor wastefully, the same principle which is in Nature also, though down there it works sometimes in one way and sometimes in the other. It illuminates the Natural scene by suggesting that a principle which at first looked meaningless may yet be derived from a principle which is good and fair, may indeed be a depraved and blurred copy of it – the pathological form which it would take in a *spoiled* Nature.

¶ from *Miracles* (1947), chapter 14

...The Nature-religions merely reinforce that view of Nature which we spontaneously adopt in our moments of rude health and cheerful brutality; the anti-natural religions do the same for the view we take in moments of compassion, fastidiousness, or lassitude. The Christian doctrine does neither of these things. (...) We shall be told that, in one sense, and despite enormous differences, it is “the same all the way up”; that hierarchical inequality, the need for self-surrender, the willing sacrifice of self to others, and the thankful and loving (but unashamed) acceptance of others’ sacrifice to us, hold sway in the realm beyond Nature. It is indeed only love that makes the difference: all those very same principles which are evil in the world of selfishness and necessity are good in the world of love and understanding. Thus, as we accept this doctrine of the higher world we make new discoveries about the lower world. It is from that hill that we first really understand the landscape of this valley. Here, at last, we find (as we do not find either in the Nature-religions or in the religions that deny Nature) a real illumination: Nature is being lit up by a light from beyond Nature. Someone is speaking who knows more about her than can be known from inside her.

¶ from *Miracles* (1947), chapter 16

... the evil dream of Magic arises from finite spirit’s longing to get that power without paying that price. The evil reality of lawless applied science (which is Magic’s son and heir) is actually reducing large tracts of Nature to disorder and sterility at this very moment.

¶ from *Dymer* (1926), 1950 Preface

... I was [in my mid-twenties] already critical of my own anarchism. There had been a time when the sense of defiant and almost drunken liberation which fills the first two acts of [Wagner’s] *Siegfried* had completely satisfied me. Now, I thought, I knew better. My hero [Dymer] therefore must go through his Siegfried moment in Cantos I and II and find in Canto IV what really comes of that mood in the end. For it seemed to me that two opposite forces in man tended equally to revolt. The one criticises and at need defies civilisation because it is not good enough, the other stabs it from below and behind because it is already too good for total baseness to endure. The hero who dethrones a tyrant will therefore be first fêted and afterwards murdered by the rabble who feel a disinterested hatred of order and reason as such. Hence, in Canto IV, Bran’s revolt which at once parodies and punishes Dymer’s.

¶ from *Surprised by Joy* (1955), chapter 9

He [Kirkpatrick] had been a Presbyterian and was now an Atheist ... I hasten to add that he was a “Rationalist” of the old, high and dry nineteenth-century type. For Atheism has come down in the world since those days, and mixed itself with politics and learned to dabble in dirt.

¶ from *An Experiment in Criticism* (1961), chapter 11, page 127

We have learned from the political sphere that committees of public safety, witch-hunters, Ku Klux Klans, Orangemen, Macarthyites *et hoc genus omne* can become dangers as great as those they were formed to combat.

¶ from *Letters to Malcolm* (1964), chapter 18

... about the *mala mentis gaudia* – the pleasures of the mind which are intrinsically evil. The pleasure, say, of having a grievance. What a disappointment it is – for one self-revealing moment – to discover that the other party was not really to blame? And how a resentment, while it lasts, draws one back and back to nurse and fondle and encourage it! It behaves just like a lust. But ... given the itch, one wants to scratch it. ... The scratch is not a pleasure simply, but only by comparison with the context. In the same way, resentment is pleasant only as a relief from, or alternative to, humiliation.

¶ the same, chapter 22

A man who first tried to guess “what the public wants,” and then preached that as Christianity *because* the public wants it, would be a pretty mixture of fool and knave.

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