



A BIBLICAL CASE FOR LIMITED GOVERNMENT

J. P. Moreland

A few years ago on ABC's *The View*, Star Parker and Michael Moore had an instructive exchange.¹ To justify state-regulated universal healthcare, Moore sought to marshal support from Jesus: Jesus claimed that if you care for the poorest among us, you do this to him. According to Moore, this proves that Jesus would be for universal healthcare. Star Parker's response was stunningly accurate: Jesus never intended such action to be forced on people by the state. Such acts were to be voluntary and from a freely given heart of compassion. I subsequently published an opinion piece siding with Parker.² I claimed that Jesus would not be for government mandated universal healthcare. The piece went viral on the internet and most people weighed in against me, including most Christians. In my view, this reaction signaled the fact that there is a lot of confusion about the biblical view of the state and its role in society.

Not long ago I watched a political dialog on national television. During the discussion, a teaching of Jesus was mentioned as support for one person's views. He was immediately chastised: "I am a born again Christian," said his opponent, "and I don't want my Lord Jesus to be dragged into politics!" Regarding political issues, I once heard a preacher announce that "Jesus doesn't take sides, he takes over."

There is something right about these assertions. Clearly, at least in one sense, Jesus is neither a Republican nor a Democrat, and Jesus's agenda for the world is not essentially political. But if we are not careful, we will continue to promote the Achilles' heel of Western Christianity: a secular/sacred dichotomy in which one's religion relates to one's private life and secularism is the proper stance to take when dealing with public issues. Such a dichotomy was not present in biblical days, nor is it true of contemporary cultures outside the West. Those in biblical days and currently outside the West embrace more of an integrated worldview in which their religious views inform all other aspects of their lives and do not occupy a private religious compartment.

While preaching at a large church, I asked the congregation, "Do Jesus and the Bible teach things that are relevant to science and evolution, to assessing secular psychology, to economics and the role of money in

life, to history, literature, art and sports?” Heads nodded approvingly around the congregation. I then asked, “Do Jesus and the Bible teach things that are relevant to politics?” A deafening silence ensued. I went on to say that while Jesus is neither a Democrat nor Republican, there are things he taught about morality, the state, and the church which a believer should factor into his political, social, and cultural thinking and practice. And some of these teachings of Jesus could favor one political party over another. So we should ask, “What did Jesus teach, and more generally what does the Bible teach, that is relevant to a believer’s view of politics and the state?”

In what follows, I shall argue that, when properly interpreted, biblical teaching implies a minimal government with a specific function to be mentioned shortly. I will begin by describing the three-way worldview struggle in our country and explain why two of those worldviews have a vested interest in big government. I will then present a biblical methodology for getting at scriptural teaching about the state. I will apply that methodology to support the claim that Israel’s ethical policies in the Old Testament are better analogies for the church/covenant community than for the government, and in this context I will clarify the role that “defining terms of address” plays in my discussion. I will then distinguish negative and positive rights and argue that the best texts for unpacking biblical teaching about the state are two: four key New Testament texts and the obligations placed on pagan nations by the Old Testament prophets. I will try to show that these key texts depict the state as a protector of negative rights and not a provider of positive rights. Thus the scriptures support a limited view of government and its function.

Next, I will turn to a description of the decisive feature of New Testament ethics in general, and Jesus’s ethics in particular, namely, virtue ethics with voluntary adherence to the love commands. I will show that, given this ethic, the state may be able to show mercy, but it cannot show compassion due to both the nature of the state and the nature of compassion. I will close with a brief treatment of the importance of Natural Moral Law in the state’s fulfilling of its God-given role so as to avoid a theocracy. And I will examine the charge that commitment to the Natural Moral Law makes one an intolerant bigot.

WORLDVIEW PRESSURE FOR SLOUCHING TOWARD BIG GOVERNMENT

In the current cultural and intellectual milieu, three worldviews fight for the allegiance of the minds of men and women in our culture. One worldview, I am happy to tell you, is Christianity. Christianity is still a vibrant worldview. It is being propagated through the churches. It is also making a comeback in the seminaries and in the secular universities. In the field of philosophy, my academic discipline, nothing short of a minor awakening has broken out. It is now widely recognized that the finest thinkers in various branches of philosophy include evangelical Christian thinkers. This was unheard of fifteen or twenty years ago. So Christianity is one worldview that is a major voice today.

The second worldview is postmodernism.³ There are many definitions of it. I will give you the strict philosophical definition. Postmodernism is roughly the idea that all truth and reality are relative to a given culture, so that there is no such thing as an objectively real world. There is no such thing as objective

truth. All truth, all value, all that is real, is what one's culture says. One culture says that God is there, another says that God isn't, and they're both right. No one is wrong, because there is no such thing as objective truth.

The third and most dominant worldview is scientific naturalism. Scientific naturalism encompasses two ideas. The first one has to do with knowledge; it says that knowledge comes only through the hard sciences. The second component of naturalism is "physicalism," the view that the physical world is all there is, and everything within the physical world is physical or depends on the physical. What science tells us is real is all there is, and the physical world is all there is.

There are three reasons why postmodernism and naturalism provide pressure toward expanding the role of government. The first reason is the need for transcendence. All of us need to transcend our own lives and to believe that we are a part of something bigger than we are. Nietzsche said that with the death of God—roughly, the secularization of society—people would no longer be able to find transcendence in a supreme being and would instead find it in the state.⁴ And this is what is happening today. In my view, the more secular a society becomes, the more its citizens turn to government to give them a sense of transcendence. Postmodernism and naturalism kill off an objectively existing, knowable God and leave people with the state as their best hope for transcendence.⁵

The second reason that postmodernism and naturalism provide pressure toward an expanded role of government is the problem of agency. Both naturalism and postmodernism imply in different ways that free, responsible agency is an illusion. Naturalism is explicitly deterministic in that it implies we are merely physical objects whose behavior is determined or has its chances fixed by factors—environment, genetics, brain chemistry—outside our control.⁶ As critic Terry Eagleton points out regarding postmodernism, since the self is a passive social construction, "there are no subjects sufficiently coherent to undertake . . . actions."⁷ Active agency and free action disappear under the postmodern cloud of constructivism. It follows that as naturalism and postmodernism gain ascendancy, the idea of individual, responsible agency vanishes, and therapeutic justice and a culture of victimization take its place. Now those that advocate free will and responsible agency tend to want government to be small and off people's backs. By contrast, those who eschew such agency tend to want government to provide care for various victims of the natural lottery.

The third reason is the need to have a cause to live for while retaining the space not to have to change personally. Let me explain. In Christian morality, change begins with me. If I am to be a part of a cause, say, caring for the poor, I must start by examining my own spending habits. Personal change is at the very root of giving oneself to a cause. By contrast, while at least naturalism does not entail it, naturalism and postmodernism sit most naturally with a relativistic view of ethics. Now, given that people are made in the image of God, they need to find a cause to which to give themselves; yet they don't want to have to change personally because everything—especially personal sexual ethics—is relative and they are victims as much as everyone else. Giving oneself to supporting big government is just the solution. It provides the catharsis of being a part of a worthy cause without the commitment requiring the individual to start by examining himself or herself and having to change.

I know my remarks here are terse, and I don't have space to develop them further. My hope is to get them before you, the reader, so you can weigh them for yourself. If I am right, then as the influence of naturalism and postmodernism increase, there will be increasing cultural pressure on the church to support big government. But is that what the scriptures teach? Does the Bible support an expansive or a limited government? It is to this topic we now turn.

A BIBLICAL CASE FOR LIMITED GOVERNMENT

1. Methodology for developing a theology of the state

When we come to examine the scriptures to see if there is a biblical view of the state, how should we go about the task? In my view, three principles should guide our investigation. The first principle regards Old Testament teaching. One should avoid using commands about what Israel was or was not to do when those commands seem grounded in the theocratic nature of Israel. Why? Because it is far from clear whether Israel is a good analogy with the state or with the covenant community—the church. As a theocracy, Israel is not a good parallel to the church/state relationship as depicted in the New Testament and in which we now live because the church is not called to create a theocracy, nor is it to relate to the secular state theocratically (e.g., by trying to impose biblical commandments on the state.) It is arguably the case that Israel is a parallel to the church so that, for example, principles of caring for the poor within Israel should be applied to the church and not to the state. When she was at her best, Israel was a voluntary covenant community.

If someone remarks that my assertion here is highly controversial, then I respond that controversy is precisely my point. Because the issue of Israel is so controversial, we Christians should try to find common—and more solid—ground on which to build our views of the state. We should avoid needless controversy if at all possible. Moreover, unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary, we have little epistemic justification to apply to the contemporary state a mandate given to Israel, precisely because the use of Israel as a parallel to the state is unclear and controversial.

Does the lack of parallel mean that Old Testament teaching addressed to the people of Israel is irrelevant to society today? Not at all. Old Testament moral teachings that have nothing to do with the special duties of the covenant community are relevant to society in general (e.g., murder is wrong, not because it violates the covenantal arrangement of God with Israel, but because it violates the image of God). More importantly, we should focus our attention on the obligations the Old Testament places on pagan nations (cf. Amos 1 and 2). These obligations would apply directly to the United States (see below).

In this regard, the hermeneutical notion of “defining terms of address” becomes relevant.⁸ When a biblical command or teaching addresses, say, someone in Old Testament times, it may address the person as a human being, a worshipper of God, a member of Israel, or a member of Israel at a specific time and place (e.g., when they were about to enter the promised land). Different ways of being addressed are called different “defining terms of address.” In each case, a person or group is addressed precisely within a certain defining context. Now if I today share that defining term of address, the biblical

teaching/command applies directly to me. So if murder was forbidden for ancient Israel because it involved taking the life of an image-bearer of God for reasons other than war, self-defense, or a capital offense, then I must avoid murder since I share in those defining terms of address. By contrast, certain ceremonial commands given to the people of Israel do not have direct application to me since I do not share in their defining terms of address (though I may, with care, derive secondary applications).

Even though there are clear texts given to Old Testament Israel with which we share defining terms of address, many of the law's teachings are addressed to Israel at a unique place in history. Moreover, in many cases it is hard to know if a social obligation is due to the theocratic nature of Israel (e.g., a tithe-tax to provide for the priesthood) or if it is a general principle of the state. Given this ambiguity, we should be very careful when applying Israel's social obligations to the state. Generally speaking, applying Israel's social obligations to the church is easier to justify since we share with the people of Israel the defining terms of address "members of God's covenant community."

To understand my second principle for discovering biblical teaching about the state, we need to make a distinction between positive and negative rights. A positive right is a right to have something given to the right-holder. If Smith has a positive right to X, say to health care, then the state has an obligation to give X to Smith. In general, positive rights and duties are correlative. That is, if someone has a positive right to something, then a duty is placed on others to provide that right to that person (or class of persons). Thus the state has the moral right to impose on citizens the duty to provide that right to the right-holder. A negative right to X is a right to be protected from harm while one seeks to get X on one's own. If Smith has a negative right to X, say to health care, then the state has an obligation to protect Smith from discrimination and unfair treatment in his attempt to get X on his own. We learn much if we approach key biblical texts about the state armed with the distinction between positive and negative rights.

The third principle is this: Given principle one above (that it is risky and, in many cases, wrong to get at the state's nature and duties by applying to the secular state teaching given to Israel), the best way to approach the development of a biblical view of the state is to examine two types of texts. The first type of text is Old Testament prophecy when the prophets speak to (usually against) pagan rulers and nations and explicitly state something about their obligations. Here we have biblical teaching about what rulers and nations outside the covenant community were to do to fulfill their proper function. The second type of text is New Testament passages on the state in general, of which there are four: Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, and 1 Peter 2:13-14.

2. Examination of central texts

Amos 1 and 2. The first two chapters of Amos provide an excellent, typical case in which the prophet berates pagan nations and rulers for doing what they were not supposed to do. Thus this text wonderfully satisfies the methodology specified above. Upon examination, it becomes clear that the prophet chastised these nations and rulers for violating people's negative rights, e.g., for forced deportation of a population, torturing and killing pregnant women, stealing, forced slavery, and murder. There is no expectation in the passage that the nations and rulers were to provide positive rights for people. This is typical of the prophets and their understanding of the responsibilities of pagan rulers and nations.

Matthew 22:21. Jesus held that the church and state had separate callings and spheres of authority.⁹ This is a widely held interpretation of Jesus's assertion "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (*Matthew 22:21*). Placed in its context, Jesus is not saying that the state is outside God's providential authority. Rather, he is contrasting duties to the state and duties to serve God within the covenant community. Given this widely held interpretation of Jesus's assertion, it follows that a believer could do things as a citizen and representative of the state (for example, be a soldier) that he could not do as a representative of the church (the church cannot field an army, but believers can serve the state in this way). Conversely, some argue that the church should do certain things that it is not the state's job to do. Solely for the purposes of illustration, some argue that showing compassion is the church's job and not the state's. I will say more about the state and compassion below.

Romans 13:1-7. "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore, he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."

There are two features of this text on which I wish to focus. First, in his excellent commentary on *Romans*, Douglas Moo makes the important point that Paul tells us to "submit" to the government; Paul doesn't say to "obey" it.¹⁰ Moo goes on to say that Paul's usage of "submit" in various texts implies an attitude or approach to the relevant authority without entailing that one must always obey that authority. If, for example, the government were to command believers to worship a false god, we would not obey that command even though our general posture would be one of submitting to government. I find this distinction between "submit" and "obey" convincing; however, even on a graded absolutist view (all moral absolutes are true but some are more weighty than others and can override less weighty absolutes in conflict situations; cf. *Matthew 23:23*), if we are to obey the commands of government as the very ordinances of God, there could be occasions when government's commands are overridden by weightier ones. In that case, one would be justified in disobeying government.

A second feature of the *Romans 13* text is that it seems to depict the state as the protector of individuals from harm due to negative-rights violations (and as the praiser of those who do not engage in such law-breaking behavior) rather than as the provider of positive rights. In the preceding context (*Romans 12:17-21*), the issue in focus is someone who has had evil done against him, i.e., has had his negative rights violated. The passage makes clear that in such a case, the individual is not to take revenge and repay evil with evil. This would most naturally raise a question of criminal justice, viz., will the person have to pay for what he/she did to me in this age? *Romans 13:1-7* answers that question in the affirmative by stating that such justice is precisely the purpose of the state. Moreover, in the verses that follow *Romans 13:1-7* (verses 8-10) the focus is on showing compassion and love to one another, a topic mentioned in *Romans*

12:20 in the context of providing things (food and drink) for one who has harmed you. Now while compassion, love, and providing for others are mentioned just before and after Romans 13:1-7, it is significant that these topics fall from sight when the nature and function of the state is in view. A good explanation for this is that the state is not to be in the business of showing compassion (for more on this, see below) or providing positive rights for others. That is an individual moral responsibility. No, the state is the protector of negative rights.

1 Timothy 2:1-2. “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.” In this text we are adjured to pray for kings and those in governing authority, and it is not a stretch to think that we are to pray for them to be successful in fulfilling their proper function. What is that function? They are to sustain a stable social order in which people can live peacefully and quietly without fear of harm. It would seem that this text is most naturally interpreted to presuppose that kings and others in authority are to protect citizens from negative-rights violations so they can live in a stable, tranquil social order. There is no mention here of the state’s job involving the provision of positive rights.

1 Peter 2:13-14. “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution: whether to a king as the one in authority; or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.” In this text, the apostle Peter seems to be in lockstep with Paul. We are to submit to the government (not necessarily always obeying it), and the purpose of government is to punish those who do harm and violate people’s negative rights and to honor those who do not disobey the law but, rather, do good. Once again, we see a limited government in view.

THE STATE AND THE NATURE OF JESUS’S ETHICS

Until now I have argued that, armed with the distinction between negative and positive rights, if we apply a certain methodology—employing Old Testament prophets when speaking to secular rulers and states, and key New Testament texts—we will arrive at a limited view of government. But there is a second area of reflection that, I believe, leads to the same conclusion—the study of the nature of Jesus’s ethics.

It is widely agreed that two features are at the core of Jesus’s ethical teaching—virtue ethics and the love commands. Along with utilitarianism, relativism, and deontological ethics, virtue theory is a major depiction of the ethical life. I am among a growing number of thinkers who believe that Jesus was primarily a virtue ethicist. According to virtue ethics, the primary questions of ethical theory are not “What are the correct moral rules to follow? What is the right thing to do in my current circumstances?” No, the primary questions are “What is a life of character and virtue? How do I learn to live such a life?” Virtue theory starts with a vision of a good, virtuous, flourishing life—for the Christian, a vision of life in the Kingdom, filled with the Holy Spirit under the lordship of Jesus—and goes on to paint a picture of the sort of character intrinsic to such a life, along with a strategy for how to develop such character. At the core of virtue ethics is the mature, character-filled person who voluntarily and habitually lives his life in a righteous way because that way expresses whom he has freely chosen to become by nature. For Jesus, learning to live well in, from, and on behalf of God’s Kingdom is paramount.

Besides virtue ethics as a general approach to ethics, the love commands of Matthew 22:37-39 and the agape-filled character expressive of those commands are at the heart of Jesus's ethical vision. Since love cannot be coerced but must be given freely, the good person is the one who voluntarily chooses to embody Jesus's love commands and to live according to their nature.

There are at least two important things that follow from Jesus's ethical vision. For one thing, forced, heartless conformity to external standards (think of the Pharisees) counts for very little in God's ethical economy (cf. Matthew 5:27-32). For another, Jesus was no ethical utilitarian. According to utilitarianism, an act or moral rule is correct if and only if doing that act or following that rule maximizes utility (e.g., produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people). For the utilitarian, the end justifies the means, and only results matter from a moral point of view—not character, freely chosen intentions, or the state of the heart in acting.

By contrast with the voluntary nature of compassion and genuine ethical action, the state is coercive and forces conformity to its dictates. The coercive approach works well when the state is protecting negative rights, but it raises an ethical problem if the state tries to provide positive rights. While the state can show mercy—it bears the sword and can refrain from using it—the state cannot show compassion. As an individual, a representative of the state can have compassion in his heart as he gives to the poor; but this compassion is exhibited by him *qua* individual and not *qua* representative of the state. The state's care for the poor is coercive since it redistributes wealth by force. It takes from some and gives to others, all by the force of law. Such actions count for very little in God's eyes because they do not reflect the features of Jesus's ethic identified above. And because Jesus was not a utilitarian, even if such actions accomplish good ends, the end does not justify the means. In a biblical ethic, helping the poor by the coercive power of the state is of little ethical value. If I am right about this, then it follows that when the state steps outside its role of protecting the violation of negative rights, the state will be incompetent and less effective than private or charitable alternatives.

THE STATE AND THE NATURAL MORAL LAW

If my arguments up to this point are correct, then the Bible presents a minimalist view of the nature of the state. The state's basic job is to preserve a stable, peaceful social order by punishing wrongdoing that involves the violation of people's negative rights. But if we are not to have a theocracy by placing the state under scripture, how is the state to obtain the kind of moral knowledge necessary to fulfill its basic function? In my view, the answer is that the state is responsible to be under the Natural Moral Law and not to be under scripture. The Natural Moral Law is objective moral norms and duties revealed by God in creation that can be known by all people with or without a Bible and whether or not they acknowledge God as the source.¹¹ If the state must be under scripture, then the state must be a theocracy, and the Bible accepts only one theocracy: Israel. There is a substantial biblical case for the existence of the Natural Moral Law.¹² To illustrate, the prophet Amos chastises a number of pagan nations for failing to do their duty to their people, and he always rests his complaints on self-evident moral truths he assumes these nations know without scripture (Amos 1). But when Amos turns to criticize the people of Israel, he faults

them for violating “the Law of the Lord,” i.e., the revealed Mosaic Law (Amos 2). The covenant community is under scripture; the non-theocratic state is under the Natural Moral Law. This is why the Declaration of Independence says “We hold these truths to be *self-evident*” and not “We hold these truths to be grounded in the Bible.” In nature, God has given sufficient revelation for the state to do its job.

One aspect of the Natural Moral Law is the idea that immoral acts violate, not primarily the moral commands of God, but the way things by nature were made to function properly. In this sense God occupies center stage as creator rather than as commander. For example, in Romans 1:18-32 the prohibition against homosexual activity is grounded in the fact that such behavior is “contrary to nature” (1:26-27), that is, contrary to the way we were by nature made to function well, and not first and foremost contrary to God’s commands. Natural Moral Law reasoning opens up the possibility that we Christians can find arguments independent of scripture for or against certain things. Therefore it is crucial for Christians to learn moral theory and moral reasoning. Here is a good rule of thumb: Go to scripture to gain moral insights and see if you can find reasons for what you find there that are independent of scripture.

One problem with Natural Moral Law needs to be addressed. Given that Natural Moral Law is a version of moral absolutism, it leads to an intolerant approach to life that should be eschewed. According to some, e.g., secular-progressives, enlightened people are tolerant, non-judgmental, and compassionate. They are unwilling to impose their views on others or judge others' behavior and beliefs as wrong. Defensive, unenlightened people are the dogmatic, intolerant, ugly polar opposites of enlightened folks. These bigots want to tell everybody else what to do, and Natural Moral Law theory engenders such an attitude.

The secular-progressive view of Natural Moral Law is ubiquitous, ignorant, and detestable. There is widespread confusion today about the nature and value of tolerance. The confusion results from conflating the classic and contemporary understandings of tolerance. By failing to keep them distinct, people quite understandably experience the injunction to be tolerant with a certain degree of ambiguity. On the one hand, we intuitively sense that tolerance is a good thing. On the other hand, there’s something pretty fishy with the way it is used today. The way out of this confusion is to distinguish two forms of tolerance, reject the contemporary sense, and retain the classic version.

According to its classic definition, a tolerant person holds that his own moral views about important matters are true and those of his opponents are false; but he still respects his opponent as a person and respects his opponent's right to make a case for his views. Thus, someone has a duty to tolerate a different moral view, not in the sense of thinking it is morally correct, but in the sense that he will continue to value and respect his opponent, to treat him with dignity, and to recognize his right to argue for and propagate his ideas. Strictly speaking, in the classic view, one tolerates persons, not their ideas.

In this sense, even though someone disapproves of another's important moral beliefs and practices, he or she will not *inappropriately* interfere with them by, for example, silencing speech and refusing to allow the person to contend for his or her views in public. However, it is consistent with classic tolerance that a person judges his opponent's views to be wrong and dedicates himself to doing everything morally appropriate to counteract those views, e.g., using argument, persuasion, voting, and so forth. If a person does not hold a particular position about a crucial issue to be morally false, what is there to tolerate?

For classic tolerance to be in play, one has to judge another's beliefs or actions to be wrong about something that really matters. McDonald's lovers don't have to "tolerate" Burger King patrons, because differences of taste about fast-food restaurants are not important enough for one side to have to tolerate the other. Differences about abortion and gay marriage are a different matter, and these are important issues of the Natural Moral Law.

In contrast to the classic view, the contemporary view of tolerance is both incoherent and morally repugnant. It is incoherent to say, "One has a moral duty to not say anyone's moral views or practices are wrong." How can one have any duties at all if no views are right or wrong? Such an assertion is like asserting, "I tell you the truth, there are no truths." Contemporary tolerance proclaims, "It's wrong to say that there are moral duties that should be imposed on everyone, and we all have a moral duty to be tolerant." Such incoherence explains why tolerance-advocates tolerate only people who are like them—other tolerance-advocates. They do not tolerate pro-life folks or those against gay marriage, in short, absolutists and any who disagree with their version of tolerance.

The contemporary view of tolerance is also deeply immoral. Why? If consistently practiced, it silences moral protest and resistance to horrendous evils such as rape, adult sex with children, racism, and a host of others.¹³ Moral protest requires us to judge that such practices are horrendously immoral, a judgment that contemporary tolerance undercuts. How can we be correct in resisting social evils if we are not to judge that anyone's beliefs or practices are wrong?

At the end of the day, contemporary tolerance is both incoherent and immoral. If practiced, it produces a society of passive, isolated, indifferent individuals so paralyzed by their own guilt and shame that they would rather live in a culture of moral indifference than risk facing their own immoral beliefs and practices. Those who advocate contemporary tolerance are moral cowards. In any case, while Natural Moral Law theory is inconsistent with contemporary tolerance, the classic version of tolerance is a dictum that is part of the Natural Moral Law.

In this paper, I have tried to present textual and ethical reasons for thinking that the Bible teaches a minimalist view of the state. I have also looked at Natural Moral Law theory and its role in the view of the state which I have supported. At the beginning of this paper, I noted a dialog between Michael Moore and Star Parker. Parker asserted that when it comes to caring for the poor, which is clearly a moral duty placed on believers, Jesus never intended such action to be forced on people by the state. Such acts were to be voluntary and from a freely given heart of compassion. I believe Parker was correct and, in this paper, I have tried to say why I think this.¹⁴

¹ June 19, 2007

² "Jesus' View of Healthcare," in *Cape May County Herald*, July 10, 2007.

³ For a brief clarification and critique of postmodernism and naturalism, see J. P. Moreland, *The Kingdom Triangle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007).

⁴ This is the standard way to interpret (and, indeed, Nietzsche's own interpretation of) the parable of the madman in *The Gay Science*, viz., as a depiction of Western culture's attempt to find a substitute for old religious dogmas and pieties by replacing them with new ones, especially nationalism and democracy. The parable may be found in Friedrich Nietzsche, *A Nietzsche Reader* (London & New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 202-203.

⁵ See Moreland, *The Kingdom Triangle*, ch. 4.

⁶ For a classic example of this view, see Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).

⁷ See Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 27-28.

⁸ I learned of this term in a personal conversation with Elliott Johnson, Senior Professor of Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary.

⁹ For an application of the notion of sphere sovereignty to the issue of caring for the poor, see Anthony Bradley, "The Kingdom Today," in *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 239-42.

¹⁰ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1996), 797.

¹¹ For a helpful exposition of the nature and relevance of the Natural Moral Law, see Jay Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know: A Guide* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, Rev Exp ed., 2011).

¹² Still extremely relevant in this regard is Alan Johnson, "Is There a Biblical Warrant for Natural Law Theories?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/2 (June 1982): 185-99.

¹³ It is self-evident that some things are right and others are wrong. Relativism is not a viable theory in the field of ethics, though it may find acceptance in popular culture. For a critique of relativism as an ethical theory, along with a defense of absolutism, see J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), ch. 20.

¹⁴ For a helpful treatment from a Christian perspective on various issues written from a conservative, minimal-government, political perspective, see Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).