

Article

A Libertarian Anarchist Analysis of Norman Geisler's Philosophy of Government

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Abstract: There are numerous approaches and conclusions regarding church and state relations and how Christianity affects public policy. Yet the purpose of this study is to question some of the philosophical assumptions and biblical interpretations that Christians hold to which support the state as a morally legitimate authoritative institution in the first place. This article will argue that various presuppositions regarding the state's moral legitimacy are untenable, if not self-refuting. The philosophical commitments of a form of Christian Conservatism exemplified by Norman L. Geisler will be analyzed and critiqued by the Christian Libertarian Anarchist school of thought, represented by Gerard Casey. Geisler's views on first principles, God's moral law, social contracts, consent, anarchy, the distinction between vices and crimes, preconditions for virtue, and the common good will be examined. Then, Geisler's interpretation of classic biblical texts supporting the alleged moral legitimacy of the state will also be assessed. This article will contend that if one were to consistently apply some pertinent principles found in Geisler's prolegomena to theology when reasoning from natural revelation and the relevant biblical data, one will find that the conclusions are more compatible with the political theology of Christian Libertarian Anarchism. Hence the one who questions how Christianity affects public policy should take into consideration the reasons to deny that divine revelation affirms the state as a morally legitimate authoritative institution. If this is the case, the question ought to be reframed to determine how Christianity affects public policy within a state that has no legitimate moral grounds for authority.



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1. Introduction

Christians debate the state's authority over the church, but a more fundamental question for Christians is whether the state's authority over *anyone* is justified. What gives one group of men the right to have authority over another group of men? Some Christians defend the God-ordained moral right for the state to exercise authority, however expansive or limited that authority may be. Other Christians deny that the state has a God-ordained moral right to exercise authority at all. Within the classical Christian tradition, Christians recognize that knowledge of reality comes through God's general revelation to mankind through nature and God's specific revelation to mankind through Scripture. Norman L. Geisler,¹ who defends the God-ordained moral right for the state to exercise authority, grounds his philosophy of government in both natural and biblical revelation. Geisler teaches that opposites cannot be true, and so our interpretations of God's revelation cannot contradict one another. His understanding is that when there is a conflict between God's general revelation and God's special revelation, the priority ought to be given to the interpretation that is more certain (Geisler 2011, p. 59). Therefore, for the Christian, the central question in political philosophy (i.e., what gives one group of humans the right to exercise authority over another group) must be answered by considering what God generally and specifically reveals relating to the topic. As Geisler warns, "the history of the arts and sciences exposes human misunderstandings of God's general revelation that

are as bad as the human history of misconstruing His special revelation.” (Geisler 2011, p. 59). However, what Geisler does not consider in his published works is the possibility that among the most devastating consequences in the history of misunderstanding God’s general revelation is the blind acceptance of the moral legitimacy of the state itself.

Gerard Casey notes that people are commonly raised to believe in the state’s legitimacy. In fact, the mass of people *have to* believe in its legitimacy in order for it to function (Casey 2012, p. 27). What is the state? According to Casey’s definition, it is “that group of people or that organization which yields a monopoly of allegedly legitimate force over the inhabitants of a determinate territory financed by a compulsory levy imposed on those inhabitants.” (Casey 2012, p. 11). Allegedly, the state is to preserve law and order, as well as protect life and property. However, Casey records the amount of people killed during the twentieth century in either state-sponsored conflicts or state-related victimization, and the conservative estimate is between 175,000,000 and 180,000,000 people (Casey 2012, p. 32). Comparatively, “The figure derived from the same source as that for state-originated deaths gives us roughly 8,000,000 non-state murders worldwide in the twentieth century which is less than 5 per cent of the state-related figure.” (Casey 2012, p. 32).²

Casey describes the position that entails the rejection of the state’s moral legitimacy as *libertarian anarchism*. It is a rejection of any form of non-voluntary domination of a person or group over another. It holds to the radical notion of freedom that people are free to bind themselves and subordinate themselves to others by entering both formal and contractual relations if they so wish. This is not the communistic and collectivistic anarchism that sees the ownership of private property as causing non-voluntary domination. Rather, it is essentially the same as “anarcho-capitalism” (Casey 2012, pp. 62–63).

Russell Kirk, in his book originally entitled *The Intelligent Woman’s Guide to Conservatism*, holds that a just state is not to decrease personal freedom under law, but rather, increase it (Kirk 2019, p. 27). However, in his understanding, government is not a necessary evil, but “in the eyes of conservatives, generally, government is a necessary good—so long as it is just, constitutional, balanced, restricted government. . . In the times of anarchy, the thinking conservative endeavors to support the claims of just government.” (Kirk 2019, p. 45). Geisler associates himself with this broad conservative agenda, including the principle of freedom against tyranny (Geisler 2009).³ Yet if the libertarian anarchist criticisms against Geisler’s conservative vision for limited government show that Geisler’s arguments from both general and special revelation fail to grant the state a morally legitimate authority, then forms of Christian political theology which argue for a *more* authoritarian state (e.g., Christian Socialism, Christian Nationalism, Christian Reconstructionism, etc.) are automatically subject to the same criticisms.

2. Method

The method of this article to critique Norman Geisler’s philosophy of government while also insisting that some of Geisler’s own philosophical principles he utilizes in his prolegomena to theology are more compatible with the conclusions of the Christian Libertarian Anarchist school of thought, exemplified by Gerard Casey.⁴ The first part of the critique will focus on Geisler’s moral justification of the state based on general revelation or natural law. This section will consider Geisler’s test for truth and whether his first principles lay the foundation for libertarian anarchism. Then the presupposition of some individuals having public rights and other individuals only having private rights will be discussed. This will be followed by an evaluation of Geisler’s reference to social contracts as a basis for government. After that, Geisler’s critique of anarchy will be considered. Following this, his views on whether the state ought to attempt legislating morality will be assessed. The final section will evaluate Geisler’s arguments from special revelation by examining the implicit presuppositions he brings to his interpretation of the biblical texts which allegedly support the state as a morally legitimate authoritative institution. What if the strongest or most common Christian arguments or proof texts which Geisler also utilizes to justify the morally legitimate authority of the state are shown to fail? Then the

question of how Christianity affects public policy should be shifted to address the Christian principles of policymaking within the context of an institution that has no legitimate moral grounds for authority.

3. Arguments from General Revelation

3.1. Undeniability as a Test for Truth

3.1.1. Geisler's First Principles

Geisler holds first principles are undeniable (Geisler 2013, p. 129). These are not known from premises to conclusion—they are known intuitively (Geisler 2013, p. 128). Geisler explains several kinds of undeniability. *Existential undeniability* is that one's non-existence is logically possible or conceivable, but if one actually exists, one cannot meaningfully deny one's own existence (Geisler 2013, p. 131). *Definitional undeniability* would be illustrated in saying, "all wives are married, all circles are round, the whole is always more than any one part, and so on." (Geisler 2013, p. 131). *Direct undeniability* is observed when a statement produces the data to defeat itself (e.g., "I cannot speak a word in English.") (Geisler 2013, p. 131). A statement that is directly undeniable may be nonsensically sayable (Geisler 2013, p. 129), but it is not meaningfully sayable or thinkable. *Indirect undeniability* occurs when the process by which the statement is derived contradicts its own thought (Geisler 2013, p. 130). Geisler uses the following statement as an example: "I came to the conclusion that I know everything intuitively." (Geisler 2013, p. 130). The very process of coming to a conclusion is deductive or inferential, so it contradicts the very statement that all knowledge is possessed intuitively (i.e., without deduction or inference) (Geisler 2013, p. 130). He also speaks of *practical undeniability*. He claims the moral law is undeniable, and our reactions help us discover what this law is (Geisler and Turek 2004, pp. 172–73). As he writes in his book co-authored by Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*: "For the person who denies all values, values his right to deny them. Further, he wants everyone to value him as a person, even while he denies that there are values for all persons." (Geisler and Turek 2004, p. 173). After giving several examples, it is concluded the objective moral law is not discovered by how one acts, but rather, how one reacts when one's values are violated (Geisler and Turek 2004, p. 175). These are the principles that undergird Geisler's philosophy, theology, and apologetic method. Is the philosophy of libertarian anarchy grounded in such principles of undeniability?

3.1.2. Libertarian First Principles

At the root of libertarianism is the non-aggression principle (NAP): "no one may initiate or threaten to initiate the use of coercive physical violence [aggression] against the person or property of another." (Casey 2012, p. 38). This is nothing more than the negative version of the "golden rule" (i.e., "do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you").⁵ As with Geisler's notion of practical undeniability, Casey notes that those who are unwilling to abide by the NAP are required to defend a form of special pleading (i.e., "I can infringe on other's liberty, but they must respect mine.") (Casey 2012, p. 44). The NAP itself flows from certain conception of liberty, namely, that one has property rights of one's own body (Casey 2012, p. 41). Murray Rothbard says the central core of libertarianism is "the absolute right to private property of every man: first, in his own body, and second, in the previously unused natural resources which he first transforms by his labor. These two axioms, the right of self-ownership and the right to 'homestead,' establish the complete set of principles of the libertarian system." (Rothbard 2006, p. 48).

The concept of self-ownership entails being able to control oneself free from coercive influence (Casey 2009, p. 7). Gerard Casey attempts to show that self-ownership is not a terminus of an argument, but it is a first principle in the sense that its denier involves himself in a substantive or performative self-contradiction (Casey 2009, p. 4). Here are the contradictory alternatives laid out by Rothbard:

There are then only two alternatives: either (1) a certain class of people, A, have the right to own another class, B; or (2) everyone has the right to own his own

equal quotal share of everyone else. The first alternative implies that while Class A deserves the rights of being human, Class B is in reality subhuman and therefore deserves no such rights. But since they are indeed human beings, the first alternative contradicts itself in denying natural human rights to one set of humans. Moreover, as we shall see, allowing Class A to own Class B means that the former is allowed to exploit, and therefore to live parasitically, at the expense of the latter. But this parasitism itself violates the basic economic requirement for life: production and exchange. (Rothbard 2006, p. 34)

Casey also answers Edward Feser's objections to the concept of self-ownership as an axiom. These objections consider other alternatives to the two that Rothbard listed above: "These are: (a) that no one owns anybody; (b) that God owns everyone; (c) that one class of people has a right to partial ownership of another class; (d) that everyone has partial or unequal ownership of everyone else." (Casey 2009, p. 5). To the objection that no one owns anybody, Casey, following Rothbard, asserts that if one owns *x*, then one has a range of control over *x*. If one does not have the right to control one's own body free of coercive interference, then one is not guaranteed to be able to act appropriately according to one's human nature. If one cannot act appropriately, then one cannot even survive (Casey 2009, p. 7). Hans Hoppe agrees that if a person's right to act in accordance with exclusive use of their physical body were not already presupposed, then no one could freely propose any propositions nor could anyone be freely convinced of propositions by argumentative means (Hoppe 2006, p. 343). This includes pro-state propositions and argumentation.

But does not God own everyone? Yes, God owns all things, but this does not diminish the reality of Him recognizing humans possess private property, thereby owning their own things in another sense (Casey 2009, p. 8). However, one may wonder if God can own things in another sense, why cannot the state own things in another sense? Cannot an individual own himself in one sense and the state also own that same person in another sense? Is there a sense in which the state can own an individual in an intermediary sense between God's ownership of that person and the individual's self-ownership? On the contrary, in classical Christian theology, there is a Creator-creature distinction: God *is* Being, while creatures *have* being. God is the Uncaused Cause of all things, while all creatures are caused. As St. Paul says, "for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'" (Acts 17:28, LSB). So it is impossible for a collective of creatures (e.g., the state) to own things in the same sense that God owns things. Secondly, the state cannot own an individual in another sense than God owns him or one owns himself, since there is no intermediary sense of being between infinite Being (God) and finite being (e.g., the state). God owns an individual in the causal sense (i.e., causing the individual's being), while the individual owns oneself in the controlling sense (i.e., causing one's actions). As Geisler puts it, "God made the *fact* of freedom; we are responsible for our *acts* of freedom." (Geisler 2010a, p. 35).

Relating to the question as to whether the state and individuals can simultaneously own the same things, Billy Christmas contends that two or more people cannot have the exclusive right to the same object or defined space simultaneously. The object of one's right cannot be the feature of another person's right or else the notion of justice (i.e., giving someone what they are due) is undermined (Christmas 2021, p. 12). One may object as follows: If an individual owns property, that individual may delegate the rights of stewardship to another person. Analogously, one may assert that God ordained the state's authoritative role to be the intermediary agent who delegates property rights to individuals. The non-statist can reply that when property owners delegate the rights of stewardship to individuals, it is grounded in a contractual agreement. But if the state only entered into legitimate contractual agreements (e.g., without force) with its inhabitants, then the state would no longer hold the same definition as it was defined in the introduction of this article. Nevertheless, *if* God gave the state this power, then a good case can be made that it is morally legitimate for the state to carry out this function of delegation. However, the proposal that God gave the state this power begs the question at hand.

Returning to the concept of self-ownership, to the question of whether one class of people has partial ownership of another class, Casey says, “Rothbard believes this entails that while class A deserves the rights of being human, class B is in reality subhuman and does not deserve those rights. But, since manifestly class B are, in fact, human beings, this is a self-contradictory position.” (Casey 2009, p. 10). Does everyone have a partial ownership of everyone else? This idea collapses into the absurdity that humans have ownership of other humans without them having ownership of themselves. Since ownership implies the right to dispose of what’s owned in a way one chooses (apart from violating other’s right to do the same) (Casey 2009, p. 9), no one in this scenario would ultimately own anyone. If humans do not have the right to self-ownership, they do not have the right to act. If one does not have the right to act, what rights do they have? Is it not definitionally undeniable that human rights are rights possessed by humans? Self-ownership is also indirectly undeniable, for the persons saying they do not have the right to own themselves (i.e., control oneself without coercive influence) are violating their statement in exercising their right in the verbal act. Self-ownership is also practically undeniable, since the denier of it at least implicitly presupposes he should have the ability to act, that is, control oneself free from the coercion of others while making the statement to the contrary. The undeniability of self-ownership and its counterpart—the NAP—are a significant challenge to any arguments put forth that attempt to demonstrate the moral legitimacy of the state.

3.2. *Public Human Rights vs. Private Human Rights*

Geisler lays out an objection to just war theory from a pacifist point of view before answering the objection. Although libertarian anarchism is not necessarily pacifistic, the principle Geisler brings up here is applicable to libertarian anarchism:

Another basic premise of pacifism is that there is no real distinction between what one should do as a private citizen and what one should do as a public official. What is wrong for a person to do in one’s own neighborhood is wrong in any other neighborhood in the world. Putting on a military uniform does not revoke one’s moral responsibility. The distinction between a person and office is rejected as unbiblical and inconsistent. No person is exonerated from God’s command not to kill simply because they have changed uniforms. The command against murder is not abrogated by one’s obligation to the state . . . No human authority has the right to transcend God’s moral law. Indeed, what authority government has is derived from God’s moral law.” (Geisler 2010b, p. 227)

Geisler rightly responds to the pacifist position in saying there is no biblical prohibition to kill. All murder is killing, but not all killing is murder (e.g., self-defense; executing capital punishment after a just trial, etc.) (Geisler 2010b, p. 233). He also rightly confirms, “The principle of using military power in self-defense can be extended to a nation as well as individuals. As pacifists also acknowledge, there is not a double standard of morality in the New Testament, with one rule for the individual and another for the country.” (Geisler 2010b, p. 231). However, a double standard (i.e., one rule for an individual and another for the country) is precisely the charge that libertarian anarchists lay at the feet of those who believe in the moral legitimacy of the state. Gerard Casey puts forth the argument:

Theft, robbery, kidnapping, and murder are all crimes. Those who engage in such activities, whether on their own behalf or on behalf of others are, by definition, criminals. In taxing the people of a country, the state engages in activity that is morally equivalent to theft or robbery; in putting some people in prison, especially those who are convicted of so-called victimless crimes or when it drafts people into armed services, the state is guilty of kidnapping or false imprisonment; in engaging in wars that are other than purely defensive or, even if defensive, when the means of defence employed are disproportionate and indiscriminate, the state is guilty of manslaughter or murder. (Casey 2012, p. 1)

For instance, theft is not a crime that a state may or may not commit. All states run off what Frederic Bastiat calls “legal plunder” (Bastiat 1998, p.18). Bastiat maintains, “When a portion of wealth is transferred from the person who owns it—without his consent and without compensation, and whether by force or by fraud—to anyone who does not own it, then I say the property is violated; that an act of plunder is committed.” (Bastiat 1998, p. 22). In a state, the law of taxation benefits one citizen at the expense of another citizen by doing what neither citizen is permitted to do without being charged with a crime (Bastiat 1998, p. 17). Why is this justified? Casey contends that the burden of proof resides with the one who wants to make a case for the state actors’ privileged moral status (Casey 2012, p. 24). He argues, “But if you or I cannot do X, we cannot authorize a government to do X. In the principle-agent relationship, we can only delegate to another powers that we ourselves possess.” (Casey 2012, p. 26). If one does not have the moral right to commit crimes, one cannot delegate this non-existing moral right to a group of other individuals (e.g., the state). Geisler’s explanation of the principle of analogy is supportive of this notion: “Being cannot give what is has not got. For it must have it (being) before it can give it.” (Geisler 2015, p. 14).

3.3. *Social Contracts and Consent*

3.3.1. The Problem of Representation

Geisler believes the basis for civil law, as well as the need for government is known through general revelation: “. . .instead of basing civil law in changing human experience (secularism) or in divine law (reconstructionism), state civil law is to be grounded in the natural law common to all human beings.” (Geisler 2011, p. 1208). He says government “is based on God’s general revelation to all men.” (Geisler 2019b, p. 500). Geisler quotes Isaac watts saying:

Based on this general revelation, man enters into social contracts in which “he engages himself with his powers and capacities to defend and preserve the peace, an order, and government of the society.” Indeed “the very reason of man and the nature of things shew us the necessity of such agreements.” (Geisler 2019b, p. 501)

However, there are fatal problems with social contract theory. Principals are supposed to be represented by an agency, but so-called political representatives cannot actually be an agent of a multitude, since those in the multitude most certainly have diverging interests. A political representative, at best, can only represent some of his principals. Furthermore, political representatives are often not legally answerable to those whom they allegedly represent (Casey 2012, p. 125). One may understand these difficulties and yet assert that those who are not functionally represented are just supposed to accept this reality, since this is the social contract they entered. But is this the case?

3.3.2. Explicit Consent to the State

Casey explores the notion of whether constitutions are contracts. He defines a constitution as a document that is considered as the basic law of the state (Casey 2012, p. 128). A contract is a binding agreement. Casey lays out the possibilities in which sense it is binding, saying “a constitution is a binding agreement among a group of people to be governed in a particular way, or it is somehow binding but not the subject of an agreement. If it is a binding agreement, these are two sub-possibilities—either it is an explicit agreement or an implicit or tacit agreement.” (Casey 2012, p. 129). The agreement is either an exchange for promises (i.e., bilateral), or the offering party makes a promise, and someone must complete specific task(s) to accept the offer (i.e., unilateral). Either way, the offer must be communicated to be valid. First, the acceptance must be made while the offer is still operative by the person to whom the offer was made. Also, the acceptance must correlate with the terms of the offer. Lastly, the acceptance may be in written or oral form. In rare circumstances, the acceptance may be inferred from the acceptor’s conduct, which must be communicated to the one making the offer (Casey 2012, p. 130). Casey asks,

If political constitutions are to be construed as contracts, we might well wonder what the offer is, what would constitute acceptance (or rejection), who is making the offer and who is accepting it, what the consideration is supposed to be and, finally, who is included within (or excluded from) the reach of the contract?" (Casey 2012, p. 131)

The answer is that the acceptance of the offer is only binding to those who subscribed to the terms. Any references to the posterity of those who subscribed to the terms have no legal significance, and it would be a form of extortion to compel those to contribute financially to any products or services in which they had not given explicit consent to fund (Casey 2012, p. 132).

3.3.3. Implicit Consent to the State

Some may suggest that one gives implicit consent to the legitimacy of their rulers if they continue to reside within a particular ruled jurisdiction. Others may argue that voting or paying taxes is another form of implicit consent (Casey 2012, p. 134). Also, if one uses the benefits of the state (e.g., provision of housing, healthcare, roads, police services, etc.), does not one tacitly accept the legitimacy of the state? (Casey 2012, p. 136). Casey answers that

...such benefits, to the extent that they *are* actually benefits, could be regarded as positive externalities much as your neighbour's dazzling flower display is a welcome addition to the visual delights of your neighbourhood. And just as you would be surprised to receive a bill from your neighbor for the pleasure his flower display gives you and rightly resist paying it, so too the benefits provided by the state being, as it were, happy accidents, you can neither be legitimately charged for them nor required to submit to the authority of the state in return for them. After all, just as one may acquiesce passively in the negative elements of state action without thereby being taken to legitimate it, so too, one can similarly acquiesce to the positive elements of state action without legitimating consequences. (Casey 2012, p. 136)

Therefore, one's participation is not necessarily legitimization, since one does not have a choice but to fund and partake in some of these services. Current citizens of a state have not necessarily consented to its arrangement. Additionally, it is impossible to change the arrangement on the state's terms. Regarding fundamental political change, Casey says, "It cannot be by voting in a situation in which a majority outcome is held to determine the choice of all, unless one wants to proceed in a viciously circular motion and justify majority decisions by a majority decision that has yet to be justified." (Casey 2012, p. 137). The reason why non-consenting citizens sometimes vote is because they are exercising preference within the political context that exists (Casey 2012, pp. 137–38). To use an illustration, Casey says if one hands over a wallet to a mugger, it would be perverse to conclude this legitimizes mugging. Voting and paying taxes is means of self-defense or self-preservation—not moral approval (Casey 2012, p. 138).

Some may object that if one does not like the current state, one can move to a different location. However, this still presupposes that one tacitly consents to obeying every command of a legal system by merely being born in a certain location or living within a certain piece of land (and, ironically, the land is not purchased or stewarded by those who coerce the landowners to fund their state operation). Casey discusses how leasing trivial things (e.g., a television) requires a complete account of the obligations one is committing to in return for receiving particular benefits. So how much more explicit consent should be required for accepting a state constitution? (Casey 2012, p. 135).

3.4. Anarchy vs. Monarchy

Although the state necessarily engages in immoral behavior apart from its citizens consent, perhaps one may try to ground its legitimacy in its pragmatic value. For instance, Geisler says,

The truth is that almost any law is better than no law. A monarchy is better than total anarchy. This is why the Bible bids believers to submit even to evil governments (Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13). Anyone who has lived through a lawless situation, like riots out of control, knows the terror of such conditions. (Geisler 2010b, p. 246)

Geisler is presupposing anarchy rejects government and law. Yet it must be clarified that libertarian anarchy rejects the moral legitimacy of the *state* (Casey 2012, p. 5). In an anarchic society, Casey maintains that law would be based on the non-aggression principle with “elaborated principles of property rights and rules of evidence.” (Casey 2012, p. 149). Based on quasi-anarchic societies that have existed, Casey provides a possible general summary of the relationship between law and governance in an anarchic society:

...victims of crime or their agents would be the primary enforcers of law; violence would be avoided by the emergence of standard mutually agreeable adjudicative procedures; restitution or reparation (primarily but not exclusively economic) would follow from treating offences as torts (invasions of personal rights) rather than crimes (offenses against the state); the enforcement mechanism would be ostracism, blackballing, blacklisting, banishment or exclusion from society and legal change would come about by evolution rather than by (legislative) revolution. (Casey 2012, pp. 148–49)

Libertarian anarchists want to prevent lawlessness and chaos—not promote it. It is ironic that supporters of the state may critique anarchists in this regard. States have been the major agents of destruction and death in the world while simultaneously claiming to be the necessary agents of defense and protection of life (Casey 2012, p. 33). What makes state aggression most pernicious is that unlike muggers or the Mafia, there is no one who can guard us against the state (Rothbard 2006, p. 58).

Since libertarian anarchy does not promote lawlessness, Geisler’s critique does not apply. In fact, Geisler’s view of hierarchy and power regarding ecclesiological dynamics supports libertarian anarchy more than monarchy. He holds that each local church ought to be independent and autonomous—not a hierarchical organization. Also, cooperation between local churches should be voluntary—not compulsory (Geisler 2011, p. 1145). One of the reasons that Geisler holds this view is due to human history revealing that power corrupts (Geisler 2011, p. 1147). He concludes, “Human depravity calls for the existence of independent, self-governing churches. Just as government is best done locally, not nationally, even so church government is best done locally, not denominationally.” (Geisler 2011, p. 1147). Yet Casey points this question to those, like Geisler, who believe in human depravity yet also believe the state is necessary: “If all human beings are intrinsically power-hungry and savage, how can we solve our problems by giving ultimate law-making and law-enforcing authority to one particular group of such appalling animals?” (Casey 2012, p. 74). Casey poses another question: “Who will restrain those to whom we have given all the power and all the weapons? And if they do not need to be restrained, why do the rest of us need to be?” (Casey 2012, p. 75). If church leaders are abusing their power or commanding immoral behavior, a member may withhold their giving or involvement until they are persuaded their offerings are going to a good cause. A citizen may seek to get the state involved for the sake of defense. But if state leaders are abusing their own power, a citizen may *attempt* to withhold their giving until they are persuaded their offerings are going to a good cause. But the difference between the church and the state is that it has the power to initiate violence against this citizen, and they necessarily will do so.

3.5. Legislating Morality

3.5.1. The Distinction of Vice and Crime

In Geisler and Frank Turek’s book, *Legislating Morality*, they contend, “We should legislate against what is objectively wrong regardless of whether or not it’s difficult to enforce.” (Geisler and Turek 1998, p. 30). Although they admit there is no exhaustive

list, they provide several principles on how to legislate morality (Geisler and Turek 1998, pp. 121–22). They note that we should not abandon our legislative efforts just because we are not sure where to draw the legal line. If certain substances eventually kill people (e.g., drugs, alcohol, and nicotine), “we should seek optimum legislation against them.” (Geisler and Turek 1998, p. 212). Nevertheless, “better legislation does not settle for the minimum nor always demand the maximum, but helps achieve the optimum good as measured by the common Moral law.” (Geisler and Turek 1998, p. 212). The reason the maximum may not be demanded is if it is practically unrealizable (Geisler and Turek 1998, p. 211).

Geisler and Turek criticize libertarians, saying, “They believe that drug use and prostitution are ‘victimless’ crimes, and therefore shouldn’t be outlawed; in other words, whatever consenting adults do should not be outlawed. But allowing consenting adults to do as they please actually imposes negative effects on others.” (Geisler and Turek 1998, pp. 33–34). Geisler and Turek’s concern is that these “victimless” private acts actually lead to addiction, sickness, injury, and death (Geisler and Turek 1998, p. 45). Yet for libertarian anarchists, the NAP prohibits the initiation of *aggression*. If one were to enact legislation based on what may potentially “negatively effect” others, everything may as well be illegal, since it could be argued that everything—however trivial—may potentially negatively affect others in some way (Casey 2012, p. 47). Geisler and Turek describe libertarians as those who want to allow consenting adults to do anything they want (e.g., engage in illicit sex, illegal drugs, and abortion procedures) (Geisler and Turek 1998, pp. 43–44). On the contrary, morally conservative libertarian anarchists would recognize that abortion is *not* a right since it is an act of aggression on innocent life. Yet the libertarian anarchist would not want to outlaw such acts as illicit sex and drug use. However, this does not indicate the libertarian anarchist morally approves of such behaviors, nor does he morally approve of state coercion as the means to stop these behaviors. Rather, there are other morally acceptable methods to minimize the promotion of illicit sex and drug use in a libertarian anarchic society, such as ostracizing and excluding people, boycotting and vocally disapproving certain companies, terminating friendships, and leaving voluntary groups (Casey 2012, p. 56). Nevertheless, the libertarian anarchist sees no moral justification for one to initiate aggression against these individuals who privately practice these vices on their own property. Therefore, there is no moral justification for a group of individuals (e.g., the state) to initiate violence on them either.

3.5.2. Law or Liberty as the Precondition of Virtue

Geisler and Turek speak of the law having a restraining effect, and so when immoral behavior is legalized, it loses its immoral stigma, and the restraining effect is removed. In short, legalizing immorality results in immoral behavior (Geisler and Turek 1998, pp. 36–37). They go so far as to claim: “Some laws actually do ‘make people be good,’ and, over the long term, laws have a demonstrated ability to change attitudes. Since laws can change attitudes, if we don’t stand firm against legalizing immorality, we might eventually start calling evil ‘good!’” (Geisler and Turek 1998, p. 39). Furthermore, they hold that good laws are a teacher of the society (Geisler and Turek 1998, p. 213). However, they grant that even if the laws cannot make people morally good, “they can compel us to do good socially.” (Geisler and Turek 1998, p. 35). It may be the case that *civil* laws that attempt to legislate conservative morality do change people’s attitude toward the objective moral good. Yet libertarian anarchists believe the *natural* law already does this (Casey 2012, pp. 96–102), so there is a better way—both morally and practically—to produce a moral society rather than commanding adults to obey with a threat of violence upon their disobedience.⁶

There are all types of legitimate motivations for one to choose a virtuous course of actions and avoid vice. These motivations could be physical, psychological, financial, emotional, relational, or spiritual. Sometimes the unpleasant or un-useful consequence of vice is being given over to the vice itself (Rom. 1:26). But without the ability to choose the good apart from external coercion, the development of virtue is not possible. In other words, liberty is a necessary precondition for virtue (Casey 2012, p. 56). Geisler’s view of divine

sovereignty and human freedom is an applicable analogy here, as he notices the distinction between praiseworthy and blameworthy acts: “But if one is not free to perform the act, then it makes no sense to praise or blame him for doing it.” (Geisler 2010a, p. 271). Geisler often writes against the coercion of the will: “A loving God will not force a man against his will. Forced love is not love; it is rape. And God is not a divine rapist! A loving God does not manipulate, since love is persuasive but never coercive.” (Geisler 2019d, pp. 379–80). He says, “Irresistible force used by God on his free creatures would be a violation of both the charity of God and the dignity of humans.” (Geisler 1986, p. 69). Why should the state coerce men into behaving a certain way when according to Geisler, God does not even go this far? Even when defending capital punishment over rehabilitative justice, Geisler acknowledges, “It is tyrannical to submit persons to compulsory cure against their will.” (Geisler 2010b, p. 204). When distinguishing various types of liberty, Casey uses the phrase “thin liberty” to describe when “an agent is unconstrained in his actions by force or by the threat of force.” (Casey 2017, p. 12). He contrasts this with “thick liberty” that leads to “thick justice” that “is not merely a matter of refraining from killing and stealing and the like; it also requires us, in a legally enforceable manner, to help the poor and hungry and the disenfranchised.” (Casey 2017, p. 14). Here, Casey’s perceived problem with thick liberty:

Advocates of substantive or thick liberty are willing, in principle, to intervene to override the thin liberty of some in order to bring about the thick liberty of others. But to be willing to intervene in the freedom of other human beings, even for what is conceived to be their own good, is to be committed to a radical kind of inequality, the inequality that subsists between the controller and the controlled, an inequality much more radical and destructive than any mere inequality of access to goods and services. To the extent that we are forced to subordinate our goals, our desires, our wishes and our actions to the commands of others, to that extent is our freedom fatally compromised and with it, our dignity as human beings. (Casey 2017, p. 14)

3.5.3. Social Good

Granted, Geisler and Turek think if the laws do not make men moral, at least they contribute to the social good. The question the libertarian anarchist may ask is: “What takes precedence? Outward socially good behavior or virtue?” If a society is virtuous, good social behavior necessarily follows. Without virtue, the “social good” is unsustainable. Why? First, Geisler himself admits, “Character, or the lack thereof, is something ingrained in one by habit. . . . Private ethics spill over into one’s public acts.” (Geisler 2020, p. 116). Also, if the citizens of a state are not virtuous, then this indicates that those who become rulers of that state will not be virtuous. If the ones in power who have a monopoly on legislating morality are not virtuous, there will be unjust laws legislated. As Geisler says, “. . .when it comes to reforming society, that comes down to votes. You’re not going to get votes until you get people who will run for those offices, who have Christian principles . . .” (Geisler 2019e, pp. 518–19).

Geisler contrasts his position on ethics that he calls “graded absolutism” with a utilitarian position: Graded absolutism “holds that following the moral rules that God has established will bring about the best results. It does not believe that human calculation of the best results will determine what the best rules should be. We keep the rules and leave the long-range consequences to God.” (Geisler 2010b, p. 110). However, Geisler has implicitly calculated that theft and other initiations of violence are the best way to keep order. Nevertheless, he explicitly affirms God has revealed that taking one’s possessions without their permission is stealing (Geisler 2012, p. 72). In the next section, we will determine if Geisler’s biblical justifications for the origin of the state soundly provide a moral basis for the institution to initiate force (e.g., take possessions from innocent citizens without their permission).

4. Arguments from Special Revelation

4.1. Old Testament Revelation

4.1.1. The Divine Commission of Man

When speaking to the origin of the state according to special revelation, Geisler argues, “According to Scripture civil law is not based in the Christian mandate to preach the gospel to all nations (Matt 28:18–20) but in the cultural mandate to subdue all things in creation (Gen 1:28). This was reinforced by God by ordaining the sword for capital punishment of capital crimes (Gen 9:6).” (Geisler 2019b, p. 498). In his article, *A Biblical View of Government*, he says this again, but with slightly different language: “Human dominion is not based in God’s Second Mandate (the gospel) but in God’s First Mandate of creation (Gen. 1:28), which He later reinforced with capital punishment for murder (Gen. 9:6)”. (Geisler 2019a, p. 472). In Geisler’s view, Adam was supposed to reign the earth, but when evil ran rampant, God gave “the sword” to Noah (Geisler 2010b, p. 221). However, basing God’s ordination of capital punishment (or civil law in general) in God’s command for Adam to subdue all things may prove to be misleading. Being made in God’s image includes the functional aspect of imaging God. Just as God subdued the chaos in the creation account and filled the earth with animate life, so Adam and Eve were to reflect God in this way (Beale 2004, p. 83). Greg Beale writes, “Before Adam’s disobedience, he would have fulfilled the ‘subduing and ruling’ part of the commission by demonstrating sovereignty through cultivating the earth and having mastery over all the creatures of the earth, including the satanic ‘serpent’ who existed outside the Garden and who would subsequently enter into it.” (Beale 2004, p. 113). The man and woman were to exercise authority over fish, birds, and animals (Gen. 1:28). However, there is nothing in the text that suggests image bearers are to subdue other image bearers either by nature or by divine command in their prelapsarian state. Rather, natural law and divine command taught they were to procreate and fill the earth with image bearers (Beale 2004, p. 113). But instead, man allowed the serpent to subdue the women by deception (Gen. 3:12–13), and through Adam’s disobedience, sin came into the world, and death came through sin (Gen. 3:17; cf. Rom. 5:12).

As a result of sin entering the world, God prophesies that women will turn to their husbands rather than God, and their husbands will dominate them (Gen. 3:16). Although some believe God is commanding man to dominate their wives, Walt Kaiser comments on Gen. 3:16–18:

The Hebrew grammar may not be rendered as “[the man] *must* [or *shall*] rule over you.” To demand such a rendering here would be to invite a similar move in verse 18 of this chapter, where “[the ground] *must* produce thorns and thistles for you.” Farmers (should this be the accurate way to render this text) would need to stop using weed killer or pulling out such thorns and thistles, for God otherwise demands that they be left in place in the farm, if this too was meant to be normative in God’s order of things. (Kaiser 2005)

Therefore, human dominion over other humans is a description of the curse from God—not a moral prescription from God. It was a choice for Cain to have dominion over his sin, but instead he chose dominion over his brother (Gen. 4:7–8). Murder is one of the reasons Geisler argues that we need human government, namely, capital punishment. Nevertheless, one must recognize that this type of “subduing,” if necessary at all, is only ordained since humans have *rejected* God’s reign and His command to subdue the beasts and chose to subdue one another instead.

4.1.2. The Prescription of Capital Punishment

Some object to capital punishment in claiming that Christ fulfilled the Law, which contains capital punishment (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 10:4). Yet Geisler correctly points out that God instituted capital punishment for all mankind in Gen. 9:6, which is long before Moses gave Israel the Law (Exod. 20) (Geisler 2010b, p. 202). Referencing Gen. 9:6, Geisler claims, “God gave the sword to the *government* to rule, not to the citizens to revolt” (emphasis

added). (Geisler 2010b, p. 254). Yet Westmoreland-white and Stassen notice the absence of any mechanism in the text to carry out capital punishment. There is no state or government established in the verses at hand (Westmoreland-White and Stassen 2004, p. 127). They say, “As other parts of the biblical writings show, Israelite readers would probably assume that the retribution would be carried out by a ‘kinsman redeemer,’ a relative who would seek out and kill the killer. Seeing this verse as a ‘mandate’ would not authorize state executions . . .” (Westmoreland-White and Stassen 2004, pp. 127–128). Commenting on Gen. 9:6, Herbert E. Ryle writes, “The custom of blood-revenge (cf. 4:10–15), which has entered so largely into the social conditions of Semitic life, whether civilized or barbarous, is here stated in its simplest terms. The murderer’s life is ‘required.’” (Ryle 1921, p. 123). Geisler acknowledges that capital punishment was expected by Cain (Gen. 4:14) (Geisler 2010b, p. 212). So if God prescribes capital punishment in Gen. 9:6, there is no reason in the text or context that would necessitate the state to administer it. In today’s world, individuals may have the right to resist and punish aggression, but it is not practical or possible for everyone to be their own defender and avenger. Thus, Casey argues that in a state of libertarian nature, protective agencies could naturally emerge just as insurance firms do. (Casey 2017, p. 834). A defense agency does not have to be a monopoly. If an aggressor and a victim are represented by different protective agencies, the inter-agency dispute could be referred to a third party for solution (Casey 2017, p. 835). Although there would be risks with having diverse competitive defense agencies, this alone does not indicate the vision is untenable, as there are already risks with having a state department with no competition (Casey 2017, p. 835).

4.1.3. The Emergence and Description of Human Kings

Though there is no explicit divine command to construct a state or any type of government in the text, Geisler holds that humans failed the test of “obeying government” and instead used its powers to make a kingdom (Gen. 11:1–9) (Geisler 2011, p. 797). The next relevant occurrence Geisler cites is a divinely approved war that Abraham fought against the kings of the valley of Siddim (Gen. 14) (Geisler 2010b, p. 235). He rightfully argues that this war was just, since Abraham was defending his land from aggressors (Geisler 2010b, p. 237). Although he soundly defends the notion that this is a just war, this does not help the case of those who believe the state or its kings are morally prescribed, as Thomas Paine notices “In the early stages of the world, according to the Scripture chronology, there were no kings; the consequence of which was, there were no wars; it is the pride of kings which throws mankind into confusion.” (Paine 1993, p. 9).

Although God later directly prescribed a theocracy for Israel, (Exod. 19:5–6), Geisler distinguishes this form of government from others that are in operation today: “No government today is ruled by God as he designed for ancient Israel. Hence no Old Testament passage can be applied to today’s governments unless it is stripped of its theocratic connotations. Failure to do this leads to triumphalism and messianic nationalism that is destructive to both religious and political freedom.” (Geisler 2019c, p. 293). We cannot use a theocracy as a blueprint for our government today, since a theocratic government does not exist in this era. Geisler also grants, “The Bible also clearly indicates that God’s order to anoint Saul king over Israel was a concession and not God’s real desire for Israel (1 Sam. 8:6–9), at least not in that time and in that way.” (Geisler 2010b, p. 232). However, Paine rightly clarifies “Government by kings was first introduced into the world by the heathens, from whom the children of Israel copied the custom.” (Paine 1993, p. 10). He contends that not only is exalting one man so greatly above the others against nature, but it cannot be defended on the authority of Scripture either (Paine 1993, p. 10). Citing 1 Sam. 8:10–18, Paine adds, in contrast to Geisler, that human monarchy was not just wrong for that time: “This accounts for the continuation of monarchy; neither do the characters of the few good kings which have lived since, either sanctify the title, or blot out the sinfulness of the origin . . .” (Paine 1993, p. 12). One may be tempted to charge Paine with committing a genetic fallacy in ascribing sinfulness to any monarchy due to its origin. But the grounding of his argument

escapes that criticism, as he says the alleged authority inherent in monarchy is against human nature and also explicitly denounced by God Himself. The warning that God gave was that the kings would reign in a manner of taking what belongs to them (i.e., by theft) (1 Sam. 10–18). After quoting from Hos. 8:4, Casey contends that

... it simply can't be the case that any king, simply by virtue of being a king, has to be deemed to have God's active support. God's providence rules over all so that everything that occurs happens with Divine concurrence, but it does not follow from this that all that happens is in accord with God's active will and approval, otherwise, murder and theft would have to be regarded as divinely approved! (Casey 2017, p. 277)

All Christians should agree that God is sovereign not only over the monarchy in Israel, but over all kingdoms (Dan. 4:25). He ordained the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman governments (Dan. 2–7). God sovereignly chooses individuals to rule these beastly systems (Dan. 2:21), and even reveals what justice would look like within the system (e.g., Prov. 16:10–12; 20:26; 29:4; 29:14; 31:4). But nowhere in the Old Testament does God prescribe the state system itself as a morally legitimate authoritative institution for all mankind.

4.2. New Testament Revelation

4.2.1. Taxes and Authority According to Jesus

Geisler acknowledges that human government is of God in one sense, but that the governments of this world are under Satan's authority (Matt. 4:8–10) (Geisler 2019b, p. 502). Was Satan, the father of lies, telling the truth that the kingdoms were in his possession when he was tempting Jesus with them? Casey answers that even a liar can tell the truth, and Jesus did not imply Satan was lying about this (Casey 2017, p. 199). Still, Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie hold that the rulers of this world are morally deserving of obedience. They write, "The Pharisees and the Herodians once attempted to draw Jesus into a church vs. state argument concerning the payment of taxes (Matt. 22:15–22). Our Lord indicated that Caesar (*the state*) has *legitimate* responsibilities and thus *deserves* the support of Christians." (emphasis added) (Geisler and MacKenzie 1995, p. 371). Casey explains that they were trying to put Jesus into a predicament. So, if Jesus answers "yes," the zealots will not be pleased. If Jesus answers "no," the Roman authorities will not be pleased. So instead of answering the question directly, Jesus uses the principle of rhetorical misdirection by telling them to give whatever belongs to Caesar to Caesar (without saying exactly what those things are) (Casey 2017, p. 200). Also, it should be taken into consideration that the coins Jesus was asked about read "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, Son of the Divine Augustus" on one side, and on the opposite side it said, "Chief Priest." This was repulsive to the Jews, since the inscription originated in the imperial cult of emperor worship and was a claim of Caesar's divinity (Grassmick 1985, p. 162). Jesus affirmed that Caesar should receive his due (whatever that is), but not more than that. Since men bear the image of God (Gen. 1:27), men belong to God, and so they should worship and devote themselves to God (Grassmick 1985, p. 162). If one is to argue that Caesar has a moral right to his coins since they bear his inscription, it does not follow that every ruler of state has the same right, since the money does not typically bear their image.

Instead of the kings of the earth having a right to demand taxes from Jesus's followers, Jesus explicitly says they are exempt from paying them:

Now when they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?" He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect tolls or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" And when Peter said, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are exempt. However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when

you open its mouth, you will find a stater. Take that and give it to them for Me and you". (Matt. 17:24–27, LSB, emphasis added)

Casey commentates: "Having asserted the freedom of the sons, Jesus's prudential recommendation here is to pay the tax to avoid a scandal that might be detrimental to his mission. I do not think it far-fetched to take Jesus's recommendation here as being limited to its particular circumstances and as having no general political significance." (Casey 2017, p. 201). From these passages that are often referenced by conservative Christians as proof-texts to show the government having a moral authority to collect taxes, Jesus is not affirming this.

The Scriptures portray Jesus as the One who heals humanity from the curse which brought the initiation of force. He explicitly taught Christians that they are not to dominate other humans:

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; (Matt. 20:25–27, LSB)

As Casey clarifies, "Those who would lead the Christian community are not to lord it over those in their care nor are they to exercise over them authority-as-coercive-domination—*archein*—that was the norm in the kingdoms of the Gentiles. Christian leadership is to be a form of *diakonia* of service, not domination." (Casey 2017, p. 201). The following section will examine the most common verses in the New Testament that allegedly teach that the state has the moral right to exercise forceful authority.

4.2.2. God's Ordination and Christian Submission According to the Apostles

Is there special honor that is due to the state? St. Peter writes,

Be subject for the sake of the Lord 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 good. For such is the will of God that by doing good you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. *Act* as free people, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as slaves of God. Honor all people, love the brethren, fear God, honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13–17. LSB)

Commenting on this passage, Geisler argues that there is no distinction between submission to the human institution and obedience to it. Yet as stated above, in accordance with his moral graded absolutism, if the government prohibits the worship of God (Dan. 3), private prayer, (Dan. 6), preaching the gospel (Acts 4–5), and instead commands idolatry (Dan. 3) or murder (Exod. 1), then the Christian must disobey (Geisler 2010b, p. 105). Casey also notes that St. Peter disobeyed the Jewish authorities, citing that he needed to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29). Taking this into consideration along with the passage above, this indicates Christians are to obey all human ordinances that do not conflict with our God-given liberty (v. 16) and the summary of Jesus's commandment of the golden rule which teaches us to honor all people (v. 17). Therefore, there is no special political significance (Casey 2017, p. 209).

The most common text in the Bible to allegedly support the moral legitimate authority of the state is Rom. 3:1–7:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist have been appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists that 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 that 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 in vain, for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of that wrath, but also because of conscience. 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. (Rom. 13:1–7, LSB)

There various plausible interpretations of Romans 13, which would coincide with Christian Libertarian Anarchism (Yoder 1994, pp. 193–210); (Ellul 1991, pp. 77–85). But the goal of this section is not to present the comprehensive list of plausible explanations, but rather, to challenge interpretations that attempt to ground the state as being a morally legitimate authority.⁷ Due to v. 3, it seems reasonable to hold that since divine ordination of the state is for the purpose of protecting the common good, when a governing authority fails to do this, they become illegitimate. But Geisler holds that even oppressive governments such as Nero's have God's ordained authority (Rom. 13:4) (Geisler 2019b, p. 505). He says "the reference in Romans 13 is to *de facto* governments (ἐξ'ουσιᾶ σς) not *de jure* ones. That is, the *legitimate* government is the one in power. According to Romans 13:1 the 'existing' (οὐσαυ) governments are ordained of God.' Thus Christians (and all men) are to 'submit' to them (Rom 13:1) and to 'obey' them (Titus 3:1)." (emphasis added) (Geisler 2019b, p. 505). According to Geisler, Christian obedience is not conditional upon whether the government is just nor whether the taxes are being used toward moral ends (Geisler 2019b, p. 505). He adds, "The only practical way to avoid anarchy is to demand obedience to the government *de facto*, since everyone can readily identify it; it is one in power at a time." (Geisler 2010b, p. 258). In Geisler's view, the only time when disobedience is allowed is in specific instances when the government usurps God's authority (e.g., prohibiting the worship of God, prohibiting evangelism, or commanding sin) (Geisler 2019b, pp. 505–6). There are three lines of argumentation the Christian Libertarian Anarchist can make in reply to Geisler's position. First, it begs the question to assume that anarchy must be avoided. Second, if a specific existing government is ordained by God, it does not necessarily follow that it is a *morally legitimate authority*. Third, even if God commands Christians to obey an authority, the command to obey does not entail that the authority is necessarily a morally legitimate one.

Regarding the second line of argumentation, Geisler's own position is that God has three aspects of willing—His prescriptive, permissive, and providential will. God's prescriptive will only involves good things that He approves and desires for mankind. God's permissive will is what God allows, even if it is morally evil (Geisler 1986, pp. 82–83). Geisler writes, "As Jesus said, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard' (Mt 19:8). Not that it was in accord with God's ideal will, but that it was his accommodation to our stubborn will." (Geisler 1986, p. 83). God's providential will is that He brings good out of our sin (e.g., Gen. 50:20; Rom 5:20). As an illustration, Geisler says we should permit the pain of having a dental procedure of an already compromised tooth so that the tooth will be better as a result (Geisler 1986, p. 83). Regarding the active ordination or prescription of the state, there is no record of it in the Bible. As shown above, the biblical narrative introduces kings while they are in a state of chaotic war (Gen. 14), and God says of Israel, "They have set up kings, but not by Me" (Hos. 8:4, LSB). God actively ordained the institution of marriage (Gen. 2:19–24) and the church (Eph. 2:14–16), but according to the biblical witness, the kingdoms of the world are ordained by God only in the *passive* or *permissive* sense—not in the *prescriptive* sense. They are permitted, since God brings good out of them (cf. Rom. 13:4; 8:28). God permits evil messengers to torment His people so that they will learn humility (1 Cor. 12:7). The state is a minister of God (Rom. 13:4) in an analogous sense as Assyria was God's rod of discipline to His people Israel (Isa. 10:5). The King of Babylon was God's servant in this regard as well (Jer. 25:9). Nevertheless, God will judge Assyria later for their unjust treatment which God permitted for Israel's good (Isa. 30:31), and He will judge Babylon too (Jer. 51:53).

Third, when God commands Christians to obey these permitted authorities, the command to obedience does not entail that the authority is necessarily a morally legitimate one. For example, God commands that children obey their parents (Eph. 6:1). This is in accordance with natural law, so parents are a legitimate moral authority until they disqualify themselves through serious abuse of their natural God-given authority (Block et al. 2014). But there is no sound principle derived from natural law which says one adult has the right to non-consensually initiate force or dominance over another adult who is rationally capable of governing themselves. As discussed above, denial of self-ownership ends in self-defeating quandaries. Geisler believes this in principle, since he affirms it was morally good for slavery to be abolished in the United States (Geisler 2010b, p. 389). In their book, *Making Sense of Bible Difficulties*, Geisler and Thomas A. Howe go further than this, asserting that slavery in the New Testament was morally wrong. Regarding Philem. 16, they argue, “Slavery is unethical and unbiblical and neither Paul’s actions nor his writings approve of this debasing form of treatment. In fact, it was the application of biblical principles that ultimately led to the overthrow of slavery.” (Geisler and Howe 2009, p. 241). They ground their argument in biblical texts such as men being made in God’s image (Gen. 1:27) (Geisler and Howe 2009, p. 241). They affirm the evil system of slavery will be judged (Rev. 18:13) (Geisler and Howe 2009, p. 242), and they argue the following:

... when Paul urges, “Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters” (Eph. 6:5 cf. Col 3:22) he is not thereby approving of the institution of slavery, but simply alluding to the de facto situation in his day. Rather, he is instructing them to be good employees, just as believers should be today, but he was not thereby commending slavery. (Geisler and Howe 2009, p. 242)

Geisler and Howe claim the Bible contains the moral principles to restore the dignity to all persons (Geisler and Howe 2009, p. 242). Thus, Geisler’s position infers that slavery is based on an intrinsically unnatural or immoral authoritative relationship. Nonetheless, the Apostles still teach that slaves are to obey their masters (Eph. 6:5). And not only are Christians commanded to obey these morally illegitimate authorities, but Christians are also commanded to obey them when they are acting immoral (1 Pet. 2:18). St. Paul gives the reasoning for Christian obedience to illegitimate moral authorities. One reason is for the sake of unbelievers. Christian obedience makes the Christian faith look attractive (Tit. 2:9–10). The other reasons benefit the Christians. Obedience is of the sake of developing a heart of integrity (Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:5–6), as well as receiving rewards from God (v. 8). While being victim of an unjust system, it is the calling of the Christian to follow Christ in entrusting oneself to God who judges righteously (1 Pet. 2:18–23).

How could a Christian Libertarian Anarchist interpret the following statement from St. Paul? “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” (Rom. 13:6–7). If one is not in a situation of anarcho-capitalism, then the state has a monopoly on force and defense. (v. 4). Therefore, St. Paul encourages Christians that their funding of this institution is practically useful in this regard. Though the tax is due in the sense that they must pay it to avoid the state’s wrath (v.5), and to perpetuate its useful services (v. 6), it does not follow that the state has the moral authority to demand payment from others. Immediately preceding Rom. 13, St. Paul admonishes Christians to bless (not curse) those who persecute them (Rom. 12:14), not return evil action for evil action (v. 17), live at peace with everyone insofar as it depends on them (v.18), and never take revenge, but rather, leave room for God’s wrath (v. v. 19). This is the exposition of Jesus’s teachings:

But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your garment also. And whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. (Matt. 5:39–42, LSB)

Would anyone argue that an evil person has the moral right to slap a Christian in the face? Or steal their clothes? Regarding v. 41, Frank Staggs adds, “Roman soldiers and officers were permitted to force natives to carry their supplies or baggage for one mile (cf. 27:32, where Simon of Cyrene is compelled to carry the cross). Jesus admonished his followers to go beyond what could be taken or required by law, giving freely to undeserving people, and not to turn away from those who would beg or borrow.” (Stagg 1969, p. 111). Therefore, God’s command for Christians to obey illegitimate authorities is not due to the fact that these unnatural authorities are justly owed obedience. Instead, a Christian who patiently endures the injustice of man is acting justly toward God who sent His Son to do the same for them.

5. Conclusions

First, it was argued that the foundation of libertarianism (i.e., the concept of self-ownership and the NAP) are undeniable. So, any political philosophy must not discount this fundamental principle. Geisler believes that no one has the right to transcend God’s moral law. But the state does this when it initiates force on others to exist. Since Geisler’s metaphysical views entail being cannot give what it does not have, this principle is more compatible with the state not possessing this right that was not given to it. It was also shown that state representatives do not actually represent those they allegedly represent, and constitutions do not meet the criteria of explicit nor implicit contracts. Therefore, social contracts cannot be a basis for the state. Furthermore, according to Geisler’s own principle, the more powerful and centralized governance is, the greater chance there is for corruption. This principle is more compatible with libertarian anarchism. Geisler’s view of anarchy was also shown to be inadequate, as he equates it with lawlessness. Since libertarian anarchists believe in laws and voluntary governance, his critique does not apply. As with Geisler’s critique of anarchism, his critique of libertarianism does not completely apply to Christian Libertarian Anarchists. The former may promote licentiousness, but the position defended in this article does not. On the contrary, libertarian anarchism is the position which preserves liberty, which is a precondition of virtue. Geisler’s philosophy of freewill correlates better with libertarian anarchism in this regard. If a society is not morally good, then there will generally be no morally good leaders, which Geisler claims is necessary for a socially good society.

Since the Christian Conservative reasons for the moral legitimate authority of the state according to general revelation do not soundly ground it, this article surveyed the possible grounding according to special revelation. Although Geisler attempts to ground the need for human government in the prelapsarian state, the Bible reveals that human dominion over other humans was a result of the curse (Gen. 3:16). Since the sin of murder is committed, Geisler attempts to ground God’s active ordination for the state in Gen. 9:6, but there is no reason in the text or context that would necessitate the state to administer the capital punishment prescribed in the text. The first mention of human kings (which implies a state) in the Scriptures is during a war (Gen. 14). When Israel asks for a king, God explicitly says this is not His desire for them (Hos. 8:4). The Old Testament describes the Gentile Kingdoms as beasts under God’s providential control, and God even appoints kings (Dan. 2:21), but there is no record of God actively ordaining the beastly system. In the New Testament Jesus’s view of the rulers of this world who dominate others is not positive (Matt. 20:25). When Jesus’s enemies asked Him about paying taxes to these rulers, He gave a rhetorical misdirection (Matt. 22:18–21). When Jesus gave an answer regarding paying taxes to His disciples, He communicated they were free from the obligation, but they should pay them for the sake of not offending the tax collectors (Matt. 17:24–27). A Christian Conservative interpretation of Romans 13 presupposes that anarchy must be avoided, but that is the unjustified assumption at hand. It was also shown that if an existing government is ordained by God, it does not necessarily follow that it is a *morally legitimate authority*, Geisler’s philosophical theology grants that God ordains things in the prescriptive, permissive, and providential sense. Due to the unjust nature of the state, it

is best to conclude God *permits* the state for the sake of the providential goods He brings out of it. Lastly, if God commands Christians to submit to someone, the command of submission does not entail that the authority is necessarily a morally legitimate one (Matt. 5:39–42; Col. 3:22; Eph. 6:5–6; Rom. 12:14–21). Geisler’s Christian Conservative position rejects the institution of slavery as being completely immoral, and this view admits that the Bible teaches that Christians were to submit to their masters. In conclusion, there is no logical problem with God commanding obedience to a morally illegitimate authority.

This article contended that the state is shown to be a morally illegitimate authority by both general and special revelation. How does this affect public policy? This leads us back to the ultimate question in political philosophy: What gives one group of men the right to have authority over other men? The answer is a consensual agreement between the ruler and the ruled. Geisler and Howe say this regarding slavery: “So, by emphasizing the inherent equality of all human beings, both by creation and redemption, the Bible laid down the very moral principles that were used to overthrow slavery and help restore the dignity and freedom of all persons of whatever color or ethnic group.” (Geisler and Howe 2009, p. 241). These principles, summarized in the main teaching of Jesus Christ Himself (i.e., the golden rule, and its negative version, the NAP) is what can limit the state’s coercive power as well.

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Notes

- ¹ Geisler’s synthesis of Thomistic philosophy and evangelical theology led him to be noticed as one of the most prolific North American classical Christian apologists of the twentieth century. See (Dulles 2005, p. 355); Wayne Detzler discerned that one of Geisler’s major contributions in Christian higher education was the rediscovery and application of Thomistic philosophy. See (Detzler 2016, p. 414); Regarding Geisler’s theology, Bill Roach argues that “Geisler’s unique synthesis of theology and apologetics are representative of twentieth century (and early twenty-first century) evangelical identity . . .” (Roach 2020, p. 14).
- ² This statistic provided by Casey is not intended to deductively demonstrate the moral illegitimacy of the state. Casey’s main point is that the very justification for the state (i.e., it provides justice and security) is significantly undermined in practice. One may object to Casey’s point and assert there could have been even more murders if the state never existed. However, due to the ample variables involved, it is impossible to make a certain determination regarding this hypothetical scenario.
- ³ Geisler says, “In summation, conservatives believe in life, liberty, and happiness based on God’s law and achieved in a context of freedom of religion and speech. In short, we believe in a godly, not a God-less government. Put another way, we believe *The Declaration of Independence*.” (Geisler 2009).
- ⁴ Casey is theologically committed to an expression Christianity, the inerrancy of the Scriptures, and he is philosophically committed to conservative social, cultural, and societal norms, as well as Aristotelian Thomistic metaphysics, which makes him a suitable interlocutor to Geisler who shares all of these commitments. For Casey’s writings on metaphysics, see (Casey 1989, 2006, 1992).
- ⁵ This does not rule out self-defense, and physical violence in reaction to physical violence must be proportionate to the aggression initiated. See (Casey 2012, pp. 38, 40).
- ⁶ Gerard Casey shows libertarian anarchy is both principled and pragmatic, “Libertarianism can be justified either by appeal to consequences—the expansion of the sphere of human liberty will lead to greater prosperity and efficiency—or by appeal to natural law or natural rights—the expansion of the sphere of human liberty is justified by the nature of man and the nature of the world in which he lives. Though the differences between the two approaches may be reconcilable, the approach I take in this book is rights-based rather than consequences based.” (Casey 2012, p. 42).
- ⁷ There are various possible Christian Libertarian Anarchist interpretations of Romans 13:1–7 that Casey does not consider. He defends his position in (Casey 2017, pp. 204–8). He explains four broad positions: “First, it requires obedience only to church authorities; second, it requires obedience to any authority to which we have given our consent— but only upon conditions and only for so long as our consent endures; third, it requires unconditional obedience to any ruler, however he may have come to power, but only so long as what he commands is in conformity with his obligation to promote justice or that provide for the

regulation of matters that are indifferent but which must be organised in some particular way for the good of the community, or fourth, it requires unconditional obedience to any ruler, however he may have come to power or however he exercises it.” (Casey 2017, p. 208).

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