

# Are the Ten Commandments Necessary and Sufficient for a Prosperous Society?

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There is an important qualitative difference between a group of individuals and individuals functioning as a society, which is a group of individuals that are organized and interact according to certain rules. Such a difference can be easily spotted when we compare an armed mob with an army unit, whose training and coordinated action can make a big difference. Or on the economic front we can compare the output of many shops (say 100 shops with 10 people each) manufacturing a car from components and a plant employing the same number of people (1000) but organized in specialized segments of production. In the latter case the difference is usually referred to as “added synergies”, and the improvement in productivity (output) can be as dramatic as 10-fold per individual (1000 individuals in 100 shops make 100 cars/day, while the car factory makes 1000 cars/day). In both cases, the sum of the assembled parts is greater than the number of the individual parts; the extra something is given by organizing, administration – in short by the management of production.

We can draw a parallel between a society and a living organism, in three important ways:

- Like a living organism made up from individual cells and organs, society is made up from individuals and social groups respectively;
- Quantitative differences between different organisms/societies in both cases are proportional with the number and functioning of constituents (cells or individuals), with higher numbers and mass ensuring better energy efficiency. In other words, an elephant is making better use of 1 kg of vegetal matter than a horse or a rhino, according to the formula  $E = k m^{3/4}$ , (E is energy consumed, k is a constant dependent on time, activity level and environment; m is body mass). Similarly 1 dollar invested in a healthy society that is more numerous will yield more value than same dollar invested in a smaller society, by the formula  $V = k n^{3/4}$ , where V is value of investment consumed per unit of economic output (GDP unit; million dollars), k is a constant directly proportional with time (t), levels of corruption (C), social division (SD) viewed as the ratio between highest vs lowest income, “bureaucracy” (B) (time of approval of official petitions, implementing public auctions, business plans); and inversely proportional with the level of administrative organization – mainly infrastructure (I) including transportation and telecommunications -, access to resources (AR), social inclusion (SI) – percentage of active workforce from total population -; n is the total number of individuals in respective society.  $K = t \times C \times SD \times B/I \times AR \times SI$ . In both cases efficiency is increased with specialization and has to do with the cooperation and inter-dependence of various segments (one segment uses the product of another – the “multiplier effect”).

*Of course, the elephant and the society must be healthy in order to prosper (if they are ill or dying, the investment will yield no added value), which leads to the last observation:*

- *A healthy, prosperous organism or society has to live by (observe) certain rules*

*So what is a healthy society?* As much as a biological organism functions according to rules and within certain parameters, similarly society has rules that it has to observe, embodied in judicial and administrative systems. These 2 systems are intertwined, even though ideally they should function independently. Administrative power can be concentrated into the hands of few individuals - in *autocratic, totalitarian* societies - or more widely distributed (inclusionary) – in *democratic* societies. Both of these administrative systems can yield exceptional material results (think of empires, kingdoms, republics and federations), so it seems that more important for the welfare of a society are the societal rules (legislative system) and their observance (justice system). And since a good rule that is not observed becomes useless, then we arrive at the conclusion that the judicial system of a society is of foremost importance - indeed the lynchpin of any society.

Having talked about a healthy society, the next aspect is that of prosperity. Broadly speaking, a *prosperous society* has increasing wealth of the material and/or cultural kind. Like a healthy living organism that has periods of growth, stagnation and regression, a healthy society in some circumstances can become stagnant; prosperity is in most cases a combination of health with additional contributing factors. Material wealth can be increased *intrinsically*, via organization and production of more and better goods, or from *outside sources* – conquests, wars, colonization and slavery. In the modern, post-colonial, global world that we live in today, intrinsic prosperity is the only widely accepted way for growth. Among the factors that influence intrinsic prosperity, innovation is the most dynamic and consequential, as we'll show next.

Throughout history, from the Stone Age when mankind was fully dependent of the products available in nature, to the current electronics & synthetics era – the Technological Age –, when a majority of the products we use are not natural but man-made, discovery and innovation is equated with development and momentous change (as a wise man noted, “The Stone Age did not end because we ran out of stones”). This is best illustrated in environments that encouraged and nurtured it. Great Britain and France in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries offered glowing examples where science was mostly the preoccupation of nobility; at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany was a hotbed of innovation in the fields of mechanical and chemical engineering, and throughout 20<sup>th</sup> century innovation belonged to The United States with more fair intellectual property laws and implementation. Today's scientists with consequential contributions are comparable to modern – day Columbus, Magellan and Amundsen's in that they open new horizons for mankind.

Innovation is also the only way for sustainable prosperity in that the new goods it creates are naturally evolving from the luxury market (based on availability and price) to the commodities market, a natural life cycle for products with society-wide benefits for a majority of individuals. By contrast, luxury markets resulting from restricted availability of natural products (gold, etc), are followed by self-limited growth with societal strains and negative economic long-term consequences leading to a spiral of conflict. This leads us to another important aspect of innovation: its implementation throughout society. Spreading of the innovation is very important, and one way to look at the importance of an innovation for a society is how widespread it is. An eloquent example is offered by China, where the Imperial Court favored innovation and gave privileged status to some intellectuals, but did not implement important innovations for the widespread benefit of society. Known examples are gunpowder, paper

manufacturing, porcelain, compass, silk; I would add to this list the specialized manufacturing of ceramic goods present in one imperial tomb – the famous ceramic army -, with a scale and efficiency that was equaled only centuries later in industrial age. Gunpowder was promoted in the Western world from entertainment status (fireworks display) to mining, road-building and unfortunately war-making. Paper was also pushed to its full potential in the Western world with the invention of the printing press by Guttenberg. Same is with porcelain and ceramic after mass production enabled at Mainz. Mass utilization of items formerly considered as luxury has created new industries and real societal progress – increasing quality of life for more people than the ideological upheaval that squares one societal class against another.

Having established that a *healthy society* needs a good judicial system and a *prosperous society* is one that relies on innovation for its development, we'll look for the ground rules that can govern such a society, rules that are “necessary and sufficient” for this human society. In order to get these rules, we'll proceed by drawing parallels as we did with society and biology, but this time we'll draw analogies from two domains where rules are clear and of foremost importance: mathematics and spirituality. Mathematics gives us the best example of “necessary and sufficient”. Indeed Euclidian geometry - named so after its Greek founder, the great mathematician and philosopher Euclid – is a logical construct which starts with 5 fundamental rules (Euclid's laws) that are completely independent and form a scaffold that when developed can adequately describe all known material shapes. These five laws (Euclid's laws) are necessary and sufficient to construct the entire geometrical “world” by using only one other ingredient: logic.

The spiritual and societal laws that we consider universal and immutable (necessary and sufficient) are those presented in the Bible, Old and New Testaments, and they have an exceptional characteristic in that they are not the result of discovery or invention or trial and error; they were given by God through chosen individuals (the Decalogue and the Christian Grace for the Western world, Islamic Laws, Buddhism, Taoism for Asia). The Mosaic Decalogue preceded any concept of universal ethics and morals that can be applied to individuals from any human society anywhere in order to be prosperous and sustain progress (other codes of law, such as Hammurabi's code, Pharaoh's Law, Mezo-American, were mostly linked to a specific, local administrative system that established and preserved human authority and hierarchy). The Mosaic Decalogue gives us the ground rules for human societies; laws that do not have intrinsic, fundamental flaws and were “tried and true” for thousands of years. From a material perspective, following rules are deemed as necessary and sufficient for a healthy and prosperous society:

- **Murder** (obvious material loss for the society, with further consequences on the attitude of the individuals towards one another)
- **Theft of property**; (obvious material loss, but discussed below)
- **False testimony** (this in turn can translate in injustice followed by material loss – theft- , or murder)

Material gains resulting from individual theft are at best neutral from the point of view of population progress. This happens because no real wealth is created in a zero-sum game or stated

otherwise, “redistribution” of wealth from one individual to another first of all is of no benefit for the community overall. Secondly, this penalizes the individuals who actually create wealth (by depriving them of the results of their efforts), and thus has a negative overall effect on motivation for progress. Furthermore, the net result of individual theft is a loss for the society, since non-productive efforts are made in the direction of recuperating the stolen (dispossessed) goods (with eventual punitive damages) or even the destruction of those goods in the case of conflicts (e.g. war).

Even though the rules of The Decalogue concerning the material aspect were debated here first; The Decalogue starts with laws concerning emotions and thoughts, not the material world. This inversion was employed because we consider that the precepts referring to love, honor and essentially non-material values can be more easily understood if we start with the material underpinning of existence and are aware of the fact that ideas, feelings and other facets of the non-palpable, immaterial realm are having material consequences through human or other natural actions.

- **Love of God and love of your neighbor:** even though love cannot be imposed or self-imposed, this is the most important precept as attested by Jesus, and we'll try to show it in our conclusion
- **Working on Sabbath:** has a material component in that breaks are necessary in man's activities, but also brings about a most important spiritual aspect of respect for God's ways
- **Carving idols:** this law underlines the reciprocal link between spiritual and material, the fact that bad or false ideals – seen as gods - can be materialized with bad consequences. True and good ideals – as embodied by faith in God – are necessary as pathway for good material results
- **Honoring parents:** is necessary because to them life is owed and this privilege must be honored (individual actions of parents and children are being judged according to the other rules).
- **Want of another's property;** and
- **Want of another's wife:** these can be viewed as both the easiest and the most difficult to observe, since these rules refer to thoughts and do not have a corresponding material aspect to prove before they translate into theft and adultery. These rules though illustrate again the primacy of spiritual over material, in that they represent the preliminary stages of material action: bad thoughts are followed by bad actions; envy and licentiousness are naturally followed by negative actions.

So what may be said in conclusion? That for a conscious and free individual, the material aspect is the consequence of efforts informed by a spiritual, ethical component. This spiritual aspect of being (ideals, thoughts and emotions) gives individuals the framework of good and fruitful conduct within society and ensures the minimization of actions with bad consequences. If you “love somebody as yourself” – the first law of The Decalogue - , not only you can never be accused of selfishness, but you will surely not be in danger of severely harming another individual, something that we have shown above that will start a spiral of bad actions for both the individual and the society. From this we can more easily understand why the Decalogue begins with the two rules on love: love God and love one another, since from these two the others ensue. So we may say that The Decalogue Laws are necessary and sufficient for a healthy and prosperous society.