This Land is your Land, But it Should be my Land

For all the lip service The Ten Commandments gets, you would think that there would be only one version of it. Nevertheless the Catholic/Lutheran tradition numbers them differently than many other protestant denominations. For the sake of argument, I list them below in the Catholic/Lutheran tradition. Rather than make up my own list of morality, (thou shalt feed me schnitzel) I find it easier to work with the most commonly accepted list in Western culture.

1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them

2. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD they God in vain

3. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

4. Honor thy father and mother

5. Thou shalt not kill

6. Thou shalt not commit adultery

7. Thou shalt not steal

8. Thou shalt not bear false witness

9. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house

10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is they neighbor’s

According to this list, not only should people not take other people’s private property (number 7), they should not envy things or relationships that their neighbors have (9 and 10) that they don’t. Put these together, and it isn’t a far stretch to claim that people should not use government to forcibly redistribute their neighbor’s property to themselves.

This helps to explain a little about the recent [Baylor Religion Survey](http://www.usatoday.com/money/economy/story/2011-09-20/god-economy/50470304/1). It found a correlation between people’s belief in God, and their desire to keep the government out of the economy. It could be that the religiously devout actually know what The Ten Commandments say and think that they should be followed. If that is the case, then religious conservatives would not favor government enforced income redistribution merely to “solve” income inequality. They see it as immoral, and against God’s plan for their life to have the wealth that God gave them taken from them.

The irreligious continually [ask the question](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/01/29/why-people-vote-against-t_n_442801.html), Why do poor religious conservatives routinely vote against *their* interests? They cannot understand why people who could gain from taking things from other people just don’t band together and vote for politicians who would give them other people’s stuff. How dare they *not* covet thy neighbor’s house! Redistributive politicians not only do not see covetousness as a vice, they actively promote it as a virtue. No moral code is going to last if the popular leaders of the day keep preaching that vice is actually virtue. Killing is a virtue, if it provides people with a choice of contraceptive. Adultery is a virtue if it means you can find your “true” love. Stealing is a virtue, if a mob democratically votes to take a woman’s house. It’s no wonder many politicians do not want The Ten Commandments posted on public property, the commandments often contradict what politicians advocate.

What I did find peculiar in the Baylor Religion Study, (to quote the USA Today article linked above): “’They say the invisible hand of the free market is really God at work’, says sociologist Paul Froese, co-author of the Baylor Religion Survey.” Adam Smith might turn over in his grave at that one. His concept of the invisible hand was not that of God pulling strings invisibly, but rather that of the spontaneous creation of economic order brought about by individuals making decisions for themselves according to their own enlightened self-interest. In this way, Darwin’s theory of spontaneous biological and ecological order is a more logical fit with Smith’s (and Hayek’s) view of spontaneous economic order. Die verfluchte Huhre, Vernunft” (the damned whore, Reason). - Martin Luther

Does capitalism create wealth because it keeps the government out of God’s way or out of entrepreneurs’ ways? Does it matter as long as capitalism creates wealth and increases society’s standard of living? For a moral foundation of capitalism, it sounds pretty weak that we should keep the government out of the way of an all-knowing, all-powerful God. I’m pretty sure that such a god could pull the strings of government just as easily as the individual heart strings of the common man on the street.

Still, it does seem unnatural, and according to The Ten Commandments immoral, to promote covetousness and employ theft to equalize people’s incomes. Either through spontaneous order or divine intervention, the world, along with its inhabitants, is a very diverse place. To forcibly equalize the outcome of the sparrow and the fox is as peculiar as the attempt to forcibly equalize the outcome of two distinct humans.