

THE TEN PROPOSITIONS OF EVOLUTIONARY HUMANISM

Ethical guidelines
for the 21st century



Introduction

When school children learn the Ten Commandments by heart in their religion class, they are rarely told that right at the beginning stands one of history's most barbaric, unethical guides to behaviour, i.e. the call for religious coercion and clan liability: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. [...] For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

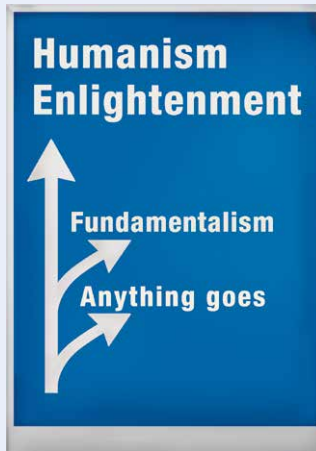
That the "Ten Commandments" are still valid for many people, who take them seriously as ethical standards, can only be explained as a manifestation of catastrophic tradition blindness and poor education. Does anyone know that in the tenth commandment women are placed on a par with slaves (sic!), animals and other "possessions"? Or that Yahweh, a couple of lines after "Thou shalt not kill", gives the following precise instructions: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live. Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death. He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed."

Any honest assessment of the "holy texts" of the "high religions" reveals that they do not come close to advocating even the minimum ethical standards of a decent civilized society! This holds not only for God's commandments as contained in these texts (e.g. the demand that homosexual actions or loss of faith be punishable by death, as found in the source texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam) but also for the behaviour attributed therein to the supreme moral authority (God). Think, for example, of the complete destruction

of Sodom and Gomorrah, the worldwide genocide of people and animals in the so-called "Flood", or even the threat of eternal hellfire that hangs over Christians and Moslems, compared to which every earthly – and therefore finite – punishment must pale.

It is thus all the more surprising that leading German politicians (such as Ursula von der Leyen) believe

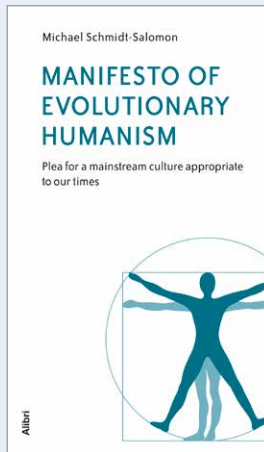
that „the first 19 articles of our Basic Law summarize the Ten Commandments“. This statement is absurd: Of course, the Basic Law legitimizes neither religious coercion nor kin liability, neither slavery nor subordination of women to men – all of which are contents of the Ten Commandments (see above)!



Conversely, the Ten Commandments of course do not include inviolable and inalienable human rights (Article 1 of the German Basic Law), the right to free development of the personality (Article 2), equal rights for men and women (Article 3), freedom of religious belief and worldview (Article 4), and certainly no granting of freedom of opinion, press, art, and research (Article 5). Not only are these fundamental rights not contained in the canon of the Ten Commandments, they are in irreconcilable contradiction to the entire orientation of the Bible!

From a historical point of view this is understandable: How, after all, could the people who, many, many centuries ago, compiled the “Holy Scriptures” have formulated basic rights that could only be developed at a much later stage of cultural evolution? It would indeed have been a miracle, even virtually a proof of God, if Moses had borne the Universal Declaration of Human Rights instead of the Ten Commandments when he made his legendary (i.e., completely invented) descent from Mount Sinai. No such thing has ever occurred, however, in the entire history of religion. On the contrary, one of the fundamental insights of the sociology of religion has been confirmed time and again:

The gods and their respective commandments have always been exactly as wise or exactly as narrow-minded as the people for whom they arose as imaginary entities in the corresponding historical context.



Because of this underlying constellation, religions are necessarily conservative. They do not devise new values for the present and the future, but are cultural time machines that transport outdated ideas of past eras into the present. This also explains why the majority of the values that constitute the modern constitutional state by no means originated from Christianity, but rather had to be secured in a centuries-long struggle for emancipation

against the resistance of organized Christianity. Whichever aspect of the modern constitutional state we focus on, democracy, the separation of powers, freedom of expression, sexual self-determination, or equal rights for men and women: All in all, religions (including Christianity) were not a driving force, but rather a hindrance to cultural progress – and they have remained so to this day!


The Ten Commandments of the Bible

And God spoke all these words, saying,
I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.



Honour thy father and thy mother:
that thy days may be long upon the
land which the Lord thy God giveth
thee.

Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness
against thy neighbour.

Thou shalt not covet thy neigh-
bour's house, thou shalt not covet
thy neighbour's wife, nor his man-
servant, nor his maidservant, nor his
ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is
thy neighbour's.

And all the people saw the
thunderings, and the light-
nings, and the noise of
the trumpet, and the mountain
smoking: and when the people saw
it, they removed, and stood afar off.

And they said unto Moses, speak
thou with us, and we will hear:
but let not God speak with us, lest
we die. And Moses said unto the
people, Fear not: for God is come
to prove you, and that his fear may
be before your faces, that ye sin
not. And the people stood afar off,
and Moses drew near unto the thick
darkness where God was.

The Ten Offers of Evolutionary Humanism

Preliminary remark: These ten “propositions” were decreed by no god, nor were they carved in stone. No “dark cloud” should scare us in our search for appropriate guidelines for our lives, because fear is seldom a good advisor. It is up to every individual to examine these considerations rationally and without fear, to accept them, modify them or to ignore them completely.

1 **Serve neither foreign nor familiar “gods” (which, on close inspection, are nothing more than naïve constructions of the primate brain), but rather the great ideal of ethics to lessen the suffering in the world.** Those who claimed to be standing closest to their “god” were often those who stood especially far from the well-being and pain of real people. Do not get involved with that tragedy. **To possess science, philosophy and art means not to need religion!**

2 **Behave fairly to your neighbour and also to those farthest away!** You will not be able to love everyone but you should respect that every person – even those you do not care for! – has the right to implement their own ideas about “good living (and dying) in the here and now” as long as these do not conflict with the equal rights of others.

3 **Have no fear of authorities, but rather the courage to reason for yourself!** Keep in mind that the strength of an argument is completely independent of who is making it. The truth of a statement depends only on whether it is logically consistent and corresponds to our real experience of the world. If today someone argues with “god on his side” this should generate not awe but roars of laughter.

4 **You shall not lie, cheat, steal or kill – unless, in an emergency, there is no other way of asserting the ideals of humanity!** Those who, under the Nazi dictatorship, did not lie, but rather willingly divulged the hiding places of Jewish families to the Gestapo, behaved in a highly unethical manner – in contrast to those who wanted to assassinate Hitler in order to save millions of people’s lives. **Ethical behaviour means not blindly following a set of moral commandments or prohibitions;** instead, it requires us, in the particular situation, to weigh up the positive and negative consequences of a decision.

5 **Free yourself from the bad habit of moralizing!** There is no such thing in the world as “good” and “evil” but merely people with differing interests, needs and learning experiences. Contribute to ameliorating the catastrophic conditions under which people today are wasting away, and you will be amazed at the friendly, creative and lovable side that the apparent “beast” Homo sapiens can show.

6

Do not immunize yourself against criticism! Honest criticism is a gift that you should not reject.

Through such criticism you stand to lose only your errors, which you should cast aside today rather than tomorrow. Have pity on those who are unable to accept criticism, and who out of deep fear have to present themselves as “infallible” and their dogmas as “holy” (untouchable). They should no longer be taken seriously in a modern society.

7

Do not be too confident! That which appears certain to us today can be out of date tomorrow!

But even doubt should be doubted! Although our knowledge is permanently limited and tentative, you should stand by those things of which you are convinced. But in doing so, be open for better arguments, because only in that way will you succeed in mastering the narrow path beyond dogmatism and “anything goes”.

8

Overcome any tendency towards tradition blindness by informing yourself in depth from all sides before making a decision!

As a human, you have at your disposal an extraordinarily adaptive brain – do not let it go to waste! Be careful to apply the same rational principles in questions of ethics and ideology that you need to operate a smartphone or a computer. **A species that can split the atom and communicate via satellite has to be mature enough to do this.**

9

Enjoy your life because it is highly probable that it will be the only one you have! Be aware

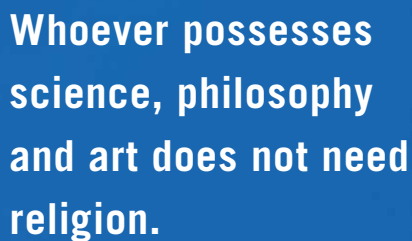
of your own, and of all our finiteness, do not repress it but rather “seize the day” (Carpe diem)! It is precisely the finiteness of an individual life that makes it so unbelievably precious! Let no one persuade you that it is a disgrace to be happy! On the contrary: **By enjoying the freedom you possess today you are honouring those who lost their lives fighting for it in the past!**

10

Put your life in the service of a “greater cause”, become a part of the tradition of those who desire(d) to make the world a better place in which to live. Such an attitude is not only

ethically tenable, but also the best recipe for a fulfilled existence. It seems that altruists are the cleverer egoists, because the greatest fulfilment of our self-interest lies in achieving its extension to others. If you feel that you are part of the “heat-flow of human history”, that will make you happier than any imaginable possession. **You will intuitively sense that you are not alive for nothing and that your life is not, and will not have been, in vain!**

(From: „Manifesto of Evolutionary Humanism“, Alibri Verlag, Aschaffenburg 2006)



Whoever possesses
science, philosophy
and art does not need
religion.

The Giordano Bruno Stiftung (foundation for the promotion of evolutionary humanism) is a think tank for humanism and enlightenment that has been joined by many renowned scientists, philosophers and artists.

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