Assuming that American society (and to a lesser extent other Western societies) has experienced a breakdown of community, how may it be resurrected? Will it suffice to reweave the frayed social bonds, or is the recreation of a moral culture also essential? If such a culture is needed, does the breakdown allow us to fashion one from scratch, or must it be constructed on the old foundations? Can this culture be formed through reasoned deliberations or must it be formed through some rather different social processes? And can there be a moral culture yet one that is "nonjudgmental"? I will draw upon the relevant points of three important books that speak to these issues but no comprehensive review of their texts is provided.

I. THE AXELROD MODEL

In an often repeated experiment studying the ways people respond to the Prisoner's Dilemma, it was found that in contrast to widely held expectations by rational choice theoreticians, the strategy many players choose is to cooperate. To do so, they developed a social norm against revenge and for mutual support. (Because in many experiments subjects are not allowed to communicate with one another by voice, written messages, or body language—their view of one another is blocked before and during the game—they use "moves" in the game to signal each other, somewhat like bidding in a bridge game.) The cooperative strategy people follow has been further examined in an often cited computer simulation conducted by Robert Axelrod. I shall hence refer to his model although his own findings are not based directly on experiments.¹ It is important to note that in this model the cooperative norm is viewed as a new, mini-moral culture which is created where previously none existed. (Axelrod writes that the "tournaments demonstrate that under suitable conditions, cooperation can indeed emerge in a world of egoists without central authority.")²

A major reason the Axelrod model is so attractive to many of those who cite it is that its findings fit well into liberal political theory. The participants in the

²Ibid., p. 20.
experiments reflected in the model seem similar to the fully formed individuals presumed in Locke's account of the formation of the social contract. These individuals are akin to many of the Prisoner’s Dilemma subjects; they lack the burden or benefit of prior shared values and develop new norms because they are compatible with their interests, and are in this sense rational and efficient. (The subjects are also similar to the Rawlsian unimprinted, free souls behind the veil of ignorance.)

Moreover, the norms formulated are not assessed in terms of their moral content. (One may suggest that avoiding conflict is a good on the face of it. However, this is not as self evident as it may seem. Conflict theory\(^3\) holds that confrontation, even violent conflicts, are sometimes necessary and justifiable to rectify grave injustices. So does the theory of just wars.) One may argue that the norms derive their moral standing from being freely, voluntarily agreed to by those who are about to be governed by them. However, the parties could have agreed to some other norms—say one player would have freely and truly agreed to act altruistically, as a pacifist, and regularly deliberately lose the game in order to avoid conflict. One needs then to ask about the substantive moral quality of the norms reached. I am not arguing for any particular evaluation but for the inescapable need to conduct them.

The Axelrod model is paralleled in the recent rediscovery of social norms by law and economics scholars. Until this important augmentation to the law and economics theories, this approach had no place for social norms (or shared social moral values). Is the norm of cooperation morally justified under the circumstances? However, recently a very small but important group of scholars who are in good standing in the law and economics school, including Robert Ellickson, Lawrence Lessig, Dan Kahan, and Eric Posner, has noted the great explanatory power of social norms.\(^4\) Norms help us to understand how informal social control limits crime, agitate against drug abuse, and curtail the need for laws to curb many other forms of antisocial behavior—and the need for law enforcement where laws are needed.\(^5\) To incorporate social norms into the law and economics paradigm (which follows neoclassical tenets),\(^6\) the group conceptualizes these norms as resulting from negotiation amongst the participants (say cattle ranchers drawing boundaries between their properties to


minimize conflict) and argues that norms are adopted because they are efficient and in this sense rational and "utilitarian." That is, explaining the formulation and enforcement of social norms requires no basic modification in the neoclassical, liberal paradigm.

Before examining the implications of this model for what Francis Fukuyama calls "remoralization," a brief comment about the ground already covered, to foreshadow the direction of my argument. Axelrod's simulation and the studies he indirectly draws on ignore the fact that the participants in these experiments bring to the game a set of already formed values; that many of these are shared by participants (players are often middle-class Americans), and that these values influenced their pro-social conduct. To test the conclusions of Axelrod et al., one would have to conduct these experiments with people who had different social backgrounds and different applicable values (such as conducting the game with participants from a culture in which revenge is considered the honorable thing to do faced with participants from a Quaker-like, peace-seeking one). In addition, in order actually to examine meaningful norm formations, the stakes would need to be higher than the outcome of a game. If I am correct in assuming that prior values play a major role in determining the observed behavior, to study people’s conduct in this and other situations should include the questions how such values are formed and through what processes they may be reformulated.

II. THE CORE QUESTION: HOW MAY A SOCIAL MORAL ORDER BE REGAINED?

The Axelrod model at first blush seems to apply to a much greater universe than solving the Prisoner’s Dilemma in two people games. It offers a key thesis about the breakdown of community writ large, that of society, and the ways it may be addressed by forming a new social order through negotiations among free agents. Indeed, the problems raised by the loss of social order have concerned scholars from the onset of modernity, scholars who pointed to the loss of gemeinschaft as a breakdown of both social bonds and a moral culture. The thesis is central to the works of Tönnies and Durkheim, sociological giants, and to scores of sociologists who followed. In the United States special attention was paid to the loss of community thesis over the last three decades of the twentieth century in the works of Robert Nisbet, Robert Bellah and his associates, Philip Selznick and Amitai Etzioni, culminating in the communitarian movement.9

7Ellickson, Order Without Law, 143ff.
Ever larger segments of the public, too, have noted this breakdown, leading an overwhelming majority of Americans (and many members of other societies) to maintain that their country is going in the wrong direction even at the height of prosperity and in a time of peace, usually major sources of popular contentment. In addition, there is a wide recognition that the loss of social and moral order is at the heart of this discontent. As a result, there has been relatively little debate either among scholars or the public at large about whether a breakdown did occur, and attention has instead been focused on how a recreation might be possible. How can new shared values and social bonds (and institutions based on both) be formed?

Examining two recent seminal works, *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam and *The Great Disruption* by Francis Fukuyama, helps explore these epoch-setting questions. Both Putnam and Fukuyama follow closely the communitarian historical analysis that preceded their work (although Putnam does not footnote it, and Fukuyama, an endorser of the 1990 responsive communitarian platform, only footnotes it very sparingly). Accordingly, both use the end of the 1950s as the baseline for their social analysis, a time at which the United States had a strong social order but one that discriminated against minorities and women and was rather authoritarian. Between 1960 and 1990 this order was largely undermined, resulting in large-scale anomie, distrust, crime, breakdown of the family, and so on. Given all these ill effects—what Fukuyama calls the Great Disruption—the question follows, how can the social moral order be reconstructed? Both Putnam and Fukuyama argue that rejuvenation is possible, and both implicitly assume that the social moral slate has been wiped clean, and that new texts can therefore be written on these tableaus. Putnam and Fukuyama, though, differ significantly in their views about the dynamics and the content of the needed text, a difference that highlights issues neither seeks to focus on.

III. THE NEED TO WALK ON TWO LEGS

To proceed it is essential to note that while there is no widely accepted definition of “community,” as I see it the way the term is widely used implies two required attributes: first, a web of affect-laden relationships among a group of individuals, relationships that often crisscross and reinforce one another (rather than merely one-on-one or chain-like individual relationships), and second, a measure of commitment to a set of shared values, norms and meanings, and a shared history and identity—in short, to a particular culture. To the extent that community (both local and society-wide) has been lost, both elements—social bonds and moral culture—must be reconstructed, although not at all necessarily by

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reconstructing the old patterns. Without bonds, people’s profound need for social attachments are frustrated and they are open to demagogic appeals. Without a shared moral culture, ordering life will have to rely on laws not undergirded by moral commitments, which is both highly ineffectual and has numerous ill consequences as we learned during the Prohibition and from the current war on drugs.

Behind the last points lies much social theory and evidence that need not be repeated here but should be briefly indicated. There is no reason to assume that people’s interests are naturally complementary or that there is an invisible hand to make societies orderly (whether or not there is one that orders the market). Hence, social order must continually be constructed—or men (and women) be wolf to one another. The resulting social order must rely on largely informal social controls, on social norms (backed up by laws) rather on laws per se if the society is to be a free rather than a totalitarian or a theocratic one. And because individuals are not free agents but embedded persons, these norms are formed largely in non-Axelrodian ways to be discussed.

One may argue that these norms can be thin or cover only the public realm. But there is a considerable amount of human behavior that must be made orderly, that is, private, for instance, to avoid spousal abuse and the abuse and neglect of children; to curb inappropriate sexual urges and aggressive feelings; to encourage people to work and save, and not withdraw from the social realm into mind-altering states.

One may argue that such norms may indeed need to be thick but maybe not shared; various communities could adhere to their own moral cultures. This is true up to a point; there is room for pluralism, However, unless it is boxed in by some shared values among communities, they may engage in mortal conflicts as we see in societies from Kosovo to Rwanda.

In this context the debate between liberals and communitarians is best seen in historical and sociological context. Despite the fact that the masters of liberal political theory wrote over difference centuries, they still all lived in an authoritarian world and tried in effect to provide legitimacy for liberty and individual rights in a social universe that had very little. Their followers in the second half of the twentieth century very much had totalitarianism in their back mirror and feared that shared values would lead to enforcement by the state. This concern is rather evident in the work of Isaiah Berlin, who argued for pluralism which merely entails leaving out some values that are beyond the pale, but not choosing among the many values that are encompassed within its confines, assuming that societies could thrive without a set of shared values. In a similar context, Habermas embraced proceduralism and Charles Taylor (and other champions of overlapping consensus) preferred to assume that social order could

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rest on people of divergent values supporting some agreed public policies. However, if one looks at the current historical and sociological condition and the direction in which free societies are drifting, one sees that the danger of moral anarchy, of a moral vacuum, is the main danger—not excessively enforced values—and that the vacuum invites religious fundamentalism and theocracy, forced morality, although not the old totalitarian kind.

In contrast, the contemporary sociohistorical situation is a thick set of substantive moral values that are truly shared and backed up largely by informal social controls of communities—not by the state. In this context to oppose such ideas in effect is to leave society open for fundamentalism, a point made by Erich Fromm in *The Escape from Freedom*.

In addition to the functionalist-consequentialist argument that societies like the American one now must fear moral anarchy and overreaction by fundamentalists more than totalitarianism, there are the existentialist standard communitarian arguments. These hold that without shared formulation of the good individuals would not be fully formed; that the sources of meaning of their life and definition of self lie in their communities. (I would only add that one can combine a commitment to particularistic values with one to individual rights and liberty. That, as we see in kibbutzim for instance, these two commitments may occasionally clash but often can accommodate one another.)

### IV. BOWLING IS MORALLY TRIVIAL

While on the face of it Putnam deals with the same social and moral breakdown that has preoccupied communitarians and the American people, he actually focuses almost completely on one of the two core elements, on the fraying of social bonds and the need for renewed social connectedness. To the extent that he deals with social norms at all, he deals with them largely in the Axelrodian liberal way.

Putnam’s focus is evident in his choice of terms. He is openly uncomfortable with the term “community,” preferring the term “social capital,” which he defines as “social bonds and norms of reciprocity.” Most of his analysis concerns social bonds. To the extent that he deals with norms at all, he considers them as “efficient” and, in this sense, rational. (Also, the term “social capital” seems attractive because, unlike “community,” it speaks to what is considered the queen of social sciences, economics, and to other followers of the neoclassical paradigm.) For the same reason, it is not accidental but consistent with Putnam liberal inclination that he views social norms as based on reciprocity. These can be given a rational, self-interested interpretation but this is more difficult to maintain if one considers social norms, at least in part, as a reflection of basic moral values, which people initially acquire from the social groups in which they have been raised, and values that they change through non-rational processes.

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such as persuasion, leadership, peer "pressure," and above all, we shall see, moral dialogues.

Much attention has been paid to the question of whether Putnam's data actually shows conclusively that there has been a fraying of social bonds, and whether this fraying is the cause of various deleterious effects visible in American society. Some have argued that people merely formed different social bonds,\textsuperscript{14} that are not included in his data, and that the ill effects Putnam sees either did not take place or had a different cause. This is not the place to examine the details of Putnam's data. Let me merely state that I join many others in finding the evidence compelling. I will take it for granted that social bonds have declined and that there has been an increase in social pathologies as a result. However, one must ask whether a restoration of social connectedness will suffice, or whether there must also be a moral reconstruction.

To put it in terms of Putnam's key metaphor—if people bowled together again, would this suffice to restore not merely a social but also a moral order? Putnam might respond that he is only concerned with restoring social bonds and what he calls "civic vitality." I will readily grant that such a restoration will serve to satisfy some human needs, such as making people less lonely. Even joining a gang or cult will do that much. But, to reiterate, it is my argument that if one is concerned with the reconstruction of a society that is centered around a social moral order rather a coercive state, this cannot take place unless both elements of community are provided.

While Putnam's statistics encompass a wide variety of social groups and associations, those at the heart of his analysis are moral trivially (and do not necessarily even involve important social bonds). People who bowl together, watch birds together, play chess or bridge—key examples to which Putnam returns again and again—do not weave strong social bonds, and weave a rather minimal moral culture that mainly consists of a few norms concerning their playing conduct, more matters of manner and etiquette than morality. Bowlers and birdwatchers may occasionally chitchat about other matters, but introducing subjects that have a serious moral content—religious differences, sexual conduct, political ideologies—is frowned upon if not tabooed. Indeed, while in Axelrod's games some new social norms arose spontaneously out of interaction and were socially beneficial, these norms were limited to the game, which is a rather thin social sphere. Similarly, if millions of people joined rejuvenated or new social groups of the bowling-league kind, some shared norms would likely develop on such matters as turning off cell phones and paying membership dues—that is, on matters directly concerning the functioning of these clubs—but not on the profound moral issues of the day. People who bowl together do not come to new shared understanding as to how far we should let globalism intrude on our lives, how much we should allow inequality to rise, what parents owe to their

children and children to their parents, how to deal with the tough issues related to new developments in biotech, when to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and so on. In effect, it seems that good manners, an important part of thin social norms, often entail avoiding such difficult and “divisive” issues.

Aside from personal experience, we know this is true because of a fine sociological study by Nina Eliasoph, who explicitly set out to study the question at hand. She found that members of four different voluntary associations engaged in very little dialogue concerning the public good or matters related to the social and moral order. Instead, they provided each other with emotional support (for example, mothers discussed with one another difficulties they faced in bringing up their children) and exchanged “technical expert” information (for example, say, on how to operate a VCR). Her data directly contradict the thesis that membership in voluntary associations will produce republican virtues and a commitment to moral values. (Her data do not necessarily contradict a much more modest claim, namely, that by the mere fact of being a member, people’s needs for attachments are served, and, as a result, they are less subject to demagogic appeals, to becoming members of the masses or mobs that the American Founding Fathers so feared.) And to the extent that these associations provide an opportunity to learn to forge compromises, run for office, and maintain an activist role, people learn the tools necessary to become politically active, a point often made by Harry Boyte and Ernesto Cortes Jr, although cast into doubt by data collected by Marc Hooghe.

Putnam focuses on voluntary associations rather than on communities, which tend to have much stronger social and moral bonds. It is best to consider voluntary associations and communities as if they lie along a continuum rather than being two distinct types. The variable is thickness. While some voluntary associations are relatively thick (in the sense of providing their members with a broad range of activities and opportunities for action and involvement, as Nina Eliasoph holds that some labor unions do, or at least used to) most tend to be thin (members pay dues, show up for a brief period of time, and invest relatively little emotion, as in a typical bowling league).

The opposite is true of communities. (To further complicate matters, many communities have one or more voluntary associations such as a PTA and a Lions, while very few voluntary associations are so thick that communities develop among their members.) As I have shown elsewhere, thickness correlates with the ability to satisfy social attachment needs and even more with the need for moral culture. Given this, those concerned with social moral reconstruction must ask how communities (especially the thicker ones) may be

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shored up, as they are more likely to provide the needed foundations than voluntary associations, especially of the bowling and birdwatching kind, being thin ones.

Why, then, are communities not the focus of Putnam's analysis rather than voluntary associations? A main reason may be that liberals shy away from communities because membership in them is often ascribed rather than achieved; it is not voluntary. Nor can they be rebuilt through Axelrodian–Lockeian processes of negotiated understandings. Ergo, to include them would require breaking out of the neoclassical paradigm and breaking with liberal philosophy.

By focusing on social bonds Putnam avoids discussing directly the question of how social norms are to be recreated and the difficult questions that arise regarding how it is possible to judge the moral standing of new norms. This latter issue arises with special force if one realizes that norms, which are formed and transmitted by communities, are often not the result of negotiation or deliberation (although they are revised by such processes), nor are they necessarily efficient, and therefore cannot be justified on these grounds. There is no a priori reason to assume that the new social norms will be compatible with a free or fair society or whatever other societal attributes or basic values to which one is committed or that provide criteria by which to assess moral rejuvenation.

Putnam does not completely avoid this issue, but he approaches it rather indirectly, which has considerable consequences both for where he ends up and for the final scope of his argument. He asks what effect different kinds of social connectedness have on liberal values, and champions those forms of connectedness that he thinks are more likely to advance these values. That is, Putnam focuses on the effects of social bonds on social norms, rather than dealing with the regeneration of norms as a parallel but distinct project.

Putnam notes quite correctly that those who simply favor shoring up social bonds will find that they tend to evolve in homogeneous groups (what Putnam calls bonding social capital) and, as a result, tend to have a major moral defect: they tend to bar from membership people who are of a different race or social class. It follows that to rebuild bonding social capital per se is, in effect, tantamount to advancing exclusion. Many liberals find this attribute of communities so contrary to their view of a free society that they prefer to view people sheeingly as individuals and rely on the state to protect their rights. And they implicitly or explicitly oppose traditional communities and fear the creation of new ones. Many communitarians ignore the exclusion issue and extol the capacity of communities to satisfy essential human needs for attachment and identity. I prefer to advocate for communities that are nestled in states that protect the rights of individuals, limiting what communities can do to their own members and others (for example, cannot discriminate). In any case, I believe that some measure of community is an inevitable foundation of non-coercive social moral order.
Putnam follows a still different line. He much prefers a particular type of social bonds, what he calls bridging social capital, in which bonds of connectedness are formed across diverse social groups. He provides an illuminating example: social capital formed at racially integrated work places. Another example would be people who live in integrated neighborhoods, which are usually campus-based or Bohemian and are relatively rare.

This approach does take us part of the way, but, as Putnam himself recognizes, heterogeneity provides no reliable protection against exclusion (or any other moral defect). For instance, if the Sicilian Mafia (itself a bridge of five communities) “bridged” with the Russian and Israeli Mafia in New York City, this would still hardly make for an open or otherwise good community. And if liberal communities bridged with macho ones, there is no guarantee that liberal values would win out. In short, those concerned with restoring community cannot limit themselves to the study of social bonds; they must analyze the social processes through which new moral cultures are formed and establish standards for assessing their substance.

Ethics, of course, is concerned with the issues that arise in the assessment of the moral standing of various, partially conflicting social norms and values. It has no difficulty in principle in recognizing that communities and societies face hard choices when dealing with values that come into conflict, such as liberty and equality. Putnam by and large does not address this problem, but when he does touch on it he not only approaches it from the standpoint of social bonds, but denies that any tough moral choices are involved.

Putnam briefly examines the three values championed by the French revolution. True to his line of analysis, he examines them only in terms of their compatibility with social connectedness, asking whether commitment to fraternity threatens liberty and equality. He concludes that there is no tension among these values whatsoever. For instance, Putnam characterizes the tension between liberty and community as a myth, writing, “I have not found a single empirical study that confirms the supposed link between community involvement and intolerance.”

All in all, Putnam covers well the ground he chose to cover: social bonds. With brief exceptions already cited, he leaves to others the exploration of the “second” element of the social moral order, shared values, the ways they are formulated and judged.

V. NATURE TO THE RESCUE?

Fukuyama works with both elements of community, paying much more attention than Putnam does to norms. Moreover, Fukuyama directly raises the question, how are new norms generated? On one level, he is rather Axelrodian: according to him norms arise spontaneously, lead to cooperative rather than competitive behavior, and persist because they are efficient. Combining an openly utilitarian
and a social Darwinist perspective, he argues that without such norms democratic and free market societies could not survive.

Fukuyama starts his account with a story about "slugs." Slugs are people who line up each morning on a street corner of a Washington, DC suburb in order to be picked up by cars on their way to the city. This extensive car pool system exists so that cars can qualify to travel in HOV lanes. Slugs and their hosts have developed extensive norms which, Fukuyama emphasizes again and again, are spontaneous and efficient (and in this sense rational). For instance, there are norms not to smoke or exchange money, to refrain from discussing sex, religion and politics, and not to jump the line. Fukuyama expects that norms can be created in a similar manner on a much larger, indeed societal scale.

Fukuyama is very much swayed by recent biological theories that suggest that our moral commitments, at least as far as cooperative norms are concerned, are genetically determined. What the slugs (and the rest of us) are doing is merely acting in accordance with our biological base, which reflects our survival needs. The Great Disruption was caused by economic and technological forces that threw us off our natural course, which we already are beginning to resume as we adapt to these forces.

For instance, according to Fukuyama new economic opportunities have led mothers to leave home and go to work outside the household. However, he states that because mothers are instinctively committed to the wellbeing of their offspring, once the facts about the harm leaving home has wreaked on their children have penetrated through various left ideologies and psychobabble, mothers begin spontaneously to work out new schedules, reflecting a renewed commitment to the family.

Fukuyama's core notion of the biological determinism of moral norms fails due to all the often made criticisms of social Darwinism that need not be repeated here. He obviously faces the difficult challenges of explaining how people with a fixed biological make-up experienced a Great Disruption in which they lost their morality, and how they then can regain it, all in an evolutionary blink of the eye. The explanations (reality penetrates ideological fogs) might work if Fukuyama showed that those who are better informed are quicker to return to the "natural" cooperative condition. However, while Fukuyama provides rich and detailed data on the breakdown, he provides none on his ideas about the reconstruction. Above all, the processes involved in remoralization are quite social and are not information driven, as I shall show shortly.

Fukuyama's assumption that social norms reflect our nature allows him to avoid the question of whether new social norms are morally appropriate and to avoid the tough choices we face when various moral commitments we hold conflict. According to Fukuyama, we might form norms that are incompatible

with our nature, but they will not be sustainable precisely because they conflict with what we truly are. He writes, "There is... an increasing body of evidence coming out of the life sciences that the standard social science model is inadequate... There is, in other words, such a thing as human nature. For the sociologists and anthropologists, the existence of human nature means that cultural relativism needs to be rethought and that it is possible to discern cultural and moral universals..." (155). Specifically, Fukuyama identifies the source of reciprocal altruism as human nature, and points out that even non-rational agents will choose to engage in reciprocal altruism because this is rewarded by greater success (172). Genes for reciprocal altruism will be passed on because they are more fit to survive. Non-rational actors, then, can, over time, instinctively follow a rational path. Nature giveth, and nobody can take it away nor be held accountable.

VI. MORAL DIALOGUES

In studying the ways a moral order may be reconstructed, it is necessary to recognize that people, even after prolonged periods of breakdown, do not live in a moral vacuum. They continue to carry in them particular traditional values (even if commitment to them has been largely washed out) and some current ones (for instance, a preference for civility and what Sandy Levinson calls a constitutional faith,¹⁸ if they are middle-class Americans). There is no moral tabula rasa on which to write ten new commandments. New norms must be formulated by building on, or revising or even rebelling against old ones, a rebelling still affected by what is being rebelled against. Traditions cannot be ignored.

I have already suggested that these prior patterns explain, in part, how participants in Prisoner's Dilemma experiments develop their norms. Similarly, the slug norms arise only in some suburbs and not in others, developing especially in places people already trust one another and share a middle-class culture (as Fukuyama himself mentions in passing). Slugs do not invent norms; they mainly draw on widely shared notions of civility and apply them to the situation at hand.

On a much larger scale, historians and sociologists have shown time and again that even when societies experience extreme disruptions, referred to as revolutions, which are very rare, the regimes that arise after the breakdown partially reflect the values of the prerevolutionary ones. Postrevolutionary French statism draws on prerevolutionary tradition, as did Communist Russia draw on Tsarist tradition.

Much more generally, all moral revivals draw on values people already have, on a cultural repertoire of known and shared moral symbols and narratives. The

past is not their only source, but it is an important basis that cannot be ignored. In the United States this traditional culture takes the form of religious values, nationalism, a constitutional faith, and a civic culture, of which, although all have been greatly weakened, none has been lost. In recent discussions about reforms, the progressive era is often evoked; a proud piece of American history would evoke few sentiments and little imagery in people of other cultures. In short, building on (and being constrained by) the cultural heritage, moral renewal draws on tradition, recasts it sometimes rather deeply, and forms newly shared values.

How are values edited and reconstructed? Primarily this does not happen through what is sometimes referred to as reasoned deliberation, in which people, to use Bruce Ackerman’s phrase, “bracket” their values by keeping them private when they engage in public give and take, and rely instead on factual and logical considerations. Or, on new information (a major factor in Fukuyama’s schema). Actually, social norms, which are informal rules that provide us with values to guide our daily life, are to a very large extent recast through moral dialogues and through persuasion, leadership and education (not in the sense of teaching or training, but of the transmission of values).

Moral dialogues consist of a very large number of interactions on many levels of society—over dinner, at work, in radio call-in shows, community social events—in which people argue with one another about the proper moral direction for people personally and for public policies.

Take, for example, the way new norms about death and dying evolved. Old norms dictated that people ought to do all they could for their loved ones until death came, which was understood to mean the stopping of the heart and breathing. Scientific and technological developments have made this norm inhumane and costly. A group of scientists suggested a new definition, that of brain death. This by itself had little effect. Nor was it followed by millions of hours of conscious deliberations, say, comparing the suggested definition to some other possible ones, or calculating the economic benefits of the new definition (although such considerations were sometimes mentioned). Instead, a grand moral dialogue on this issue was fed by editorials, movies and TV shows, and above all by a dramatic case of a young woman who lay in a coma for years on end. Very gradually, people’s moral commitments and associated emotions regarding death shifted, making for increased, albeit far from complete, acceptance of the new norms.

We have had such moral dialogues about the environment, relations among the races and between the genders, and are currently having such dialogues about the death penalty and gay marriages. In all of them facts and rational deliberations play a minor role; they are mainly constituted of sorting out what is right and how it relates to traditional values, by appealing to symbols, narratives and moral reasoning. They differ from rational deliberations the way ethics differs from engineering.
These dialogues can be quite readily observed. They involve no genes, sudden departures from their dictates and mysterious return to their predetermined course. They are culturally specific, rather than universal as most of our genes are. And their conclusions are not automatically good. Consensus does not make right. A community can fully agree to lynch all foreigners, burn books or exploit children. Ergo the moral conclusions of any community must be subject to critical moral accounting, above and beyond the way they have been reached.

Because I have discussed elsewhere my argument that the proper basis for such an evaluation is a new golden rule, the core value of a carefully crafted balance between liberty and social order, one which speaks to us as a self-evident truth, a deontological position, I shall not repeat these arguments here. Let me merely state that without some such criteria moral judgments of the good formulated by a given community cannot be properly evaluated nor can inevitable hard choices among conflicting moral claims be properly concluded.

VII. TOLERANCE OR RESPECT?

Let us grant for a moment that community renewal requires a reconstruction of a moral order, which entails drawing on old values and formulating new ones. We then face the question, must a shared moral culture be intolerant of other social norms? For instance, does a recommitment to a two-parent family entail a renewed censure of singles, divorcees and childless couples? Is it possible for such a renewed commitment to take hold if single-parent families are considered morally equivalent to two-parent ones?

Alan Wolfe’s One Nation After All sharpens one aspect of this issue despite the fact that Wolfe’s work is not a study of reconstruction, but of the current state of American moral values. Wolfe is often properly celebrated for showing that Americans are not engaged in culture wars among people of opposing values. Middle-class Americans do not feel strongly enough about most values to be willing to fight over them and oppose the imposition of values by law on others.

Moreover, Americans’ morality has retreated from the public sphere into a private world, one in which people hold various beliefs but are not willing to pass judgment upon different beliefs (or the lack of beliefs) held by others. Wolfe writes, “When Thoreau wrote ‘Walden,’ America was an overwhelmingly Christian society in which morality was public while work and family were private. Today, people choose their religions and shape their moralities even as they can no longer shield their incomes, family sizes or consumer preferences (if they shop on the Internet) from inquisitive eyes. The less privacy we have over the things that matter relatively little, the more privacy we crave over the things that matter most.” A line that was quoted again and again to Wolfe, that should

19Etzioni, New Golden Rule.
warm the cockles of the hearts of cultural and moral relativists, is “judge not lest ye be judged.” (A study of suburbia by M. P. Baumgartner lends further support to this observation.)

As I see it, there is a significant ambiguity in this finding, not in Wolfe’s interpretation but in the American mind, which is highly relevant to the question of what a moral renewal must entail. Sometimes the illuminating quotes that Wolfe provides suggest that people have absorbed the idea of non-judgmentalism so much that they have moved way beyond tolerance to fully respecting all alternatives, treating moral differences as if they were merely, in the terms of social conservatives, lifestyle options. Typically, a woman told Wolfe “I mean, gosh, I have all kinds of friends … and they have all kinds of beliefs. I think that they’re all good people.” Viewed this way, Americans appear to treat moral differences as though they amount to no more than differences in taste—I prefer Italian food to French, but if you prefer the opposite, that is equally dandy. I am OK, you are OK, whatever our moral preferences.

At other times, Americans sound as if they have merely grown more tolerant of differences, but not indifferent to them, not merely privately but also in their public life. For instance, they do not merely believe that it is wrong to neglect their own children, but they believe that it is wrong for others to neglect theirs as well. They communicate to others—I will put up with such behavior and not call the police or welfare agency (assuming it is not extreme and does not violate the law), nor even rant and rave about it, but it is not really something I fully approve of.

The question hence is, both for the American condition and for how far moral renewal has to reach, rests on a difference between tolerance and respect, two terms that are often conflated or confused. To be tolerant merely means that I have a set of values I hold dear but I am not willing to make you abide by them, but I will let you know and hence communicate, however gently, my position. To fully respect other positions is to treat them as morally equivalent to mine, and indicate that I have no reason to address yours in any way, hoping that you will change yours. Indeed, one may wonder if someone who truly respects all positions has one at all, because moral positions entail a sense that they prescribe the right course to follow—not merely for me but for all in the same condition. (Homosexuals caught on to this difference and often state that they do not seek tolerance but respect. They want their behavior to be recognized as fully legitimate, as good as any other.) A society in which most if not all


\[22\] Alan Wolfe, *One Nation After All*, p. 53.

\[23\] One may say that the moral issues cited here are those in the immediate social circles and do not concern the value issues that underlie public policy issues, the focus of Wolfe’s interest. My response would be that, by and large, Wolfe’s findings have been read to be comprehensive and not limited to public policy issues and, most important, that the same issue will arise here: do people who believe that most of those on welfare are cheats, serial killers should be hanged, and so on, merely keep those judgments to themselves or are they willing to urge them on others—however gently—and take them into account when they cast their votes?
moral positions are respected has lost much more of its moral order, and done much less to formulate a new one, than one in which people have grown much more tolerant. Indeed, a society can make a high level of tolerance one of its key values, but moral indifference is not a value by definition but the lack of one.

Wolfe writes that Americans have turned the Ten Commandments into the Ten Suggestions which is especially revealing because this straddles the line I suggest is crucial. (Reference is not necessarily to religious dictates, but to the difference in the extent of certitude and commitment, whether the source of the moral tenets is religious or secular.) Making suggestions to others with an indifference to what the other person chooses (say, treating adultery the way most Americans now treat premarital sex among adults) is rather different from making suggestions that communicate, in a gentler, kinder way than commandments do—by body language, by tone of voice, by whom we invite over for dinner, and whom we avoid—what we consider to be moral, and what we disapprove of.

If one refers to the first as moral indifference, the second may be called soft morality. When compared to traditional forms of moral imposition and to some social conservative positions and authoritarian regimes such as those in Afghanistan, Iran, Singapore, and even Japan, this difference may well seem minor. However, for free societies it is crucial. The reason it is crucial is that for societies to maintain a moral order (and ultimately a social one), especially one not based on coercion, they must rely on informal moral voices, in which communities draw on the profound need for human attachment (social bonds) to make people heed shared norms. That is, instead of policing people, informal social control—which often accounts for 90 per cent or more of the social order in free societies—encourages people to abide by shared social norms, whether or not they are ensconced in laws. Without some shared values and their undergirding by the moral voice of one’s fellow community members, the social foundation of a moral revival may be missing.

If people hold values, but are unwilling, however gently, to speak up for them and to try to convince others of their virtue, one cannot but wonder if they are actually committed to them. After all, they allow the value of sociability to take precedence over all moral considerations. A moral revival cannot thrive in a culture of moral indifference, but it can progress well in a world of tolerance, it can rest on soft morality, especially if social bonds are viable (or themselves renewed) and relatively thick.