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AMERICA THE TRADITIONAL

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Observers of America since Alexis de Tocqueville have noted that America is unusual, deviant, exceptional, and qualitatively different from other societies (Tocqueville 1988). Kingdon (1999), for example, calls the nation “America the unusual,” due to an uncommon and abiding preference for limited government. Lipset (1996) emphasizes the unique values expressed in the American Creed: “liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire” (p. 19). This chapter contributes to the theme of American exceptionalism by examining America’s moral values. It is an abridged version of analyses, arguments, and text from *America’s Crisis of Values: Reality and Perception* (Baker 2005). First, I examine the “moral visions” of Americans. Moral visions are worldviews about the location of moral authority—in the self or in God (e.g., Jaspers 1953; Orrù 1987; Eisenstadt 1982). These moral visions are known colloquially as relativism and absolutism. Second, I examine values along two dimensions —traditional versus secular-rational values and survival versus self-expression values (e.g., Inglehart and Baker 2000). Third, I consider the relationship of moral visions and these two dimensions to attitudes about the separation of church and state. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of the findings for the American “culture war” thesis and the widespread perception of a crisis of values in America.

The approach presented here permits America's value system to be compared directly with the value systems of many other societies. Because *specific* values (such as certain religious or cultural beliefs) may vary from society to society, valid cross-cultural comparisons can be difficult to make. However, moral visions and the two cultural dimensions capture value orientations in a way that permits valid comparisons of diverse cultures. With this approach, America is exceptional to the extent that its views of moral authority are unique or unusual, and its locations on the two dimensions (traditional/secular-rational; survival/self-expression) are unique or unusual. As I demonstrate, America is one of the most absolutist nations in the world, and has become increasingly so over time. Moreover, it is one of the most traditional societies in the world. Thus, America's moral visions and location on the traditional/secular-rational values dimension are quite unusual, compared to the value systems of most economically advanced democracies. However, America is also self-expression oriented and it has moved rapidly in this direction along the survival/self-expression dimension. In this respect, it is similar to other economically advanced democracies.

Therefore, I make the case that American exceptionalism occurs in two ways. First, America's value system is exceptionally absolutist and traditional (hence the chapter's title). Second, the nation's value system is exceptional also because it combines traditional *and* self-expression values. Among most post-industrial societies, secular values and self-expression values go hand in hand; correspondingly, among poor nations, traditional values and survival values go together (e.g., Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart and Norris 2003). As I discuss in the conclusion, this mix of absolutist and traditional values with self-expression values presents contradictory guides to action.

These contradictory guides to action contribute to the widespread perception of a crisis of values in America. These contradictory guides also produce cognitive dissonance in Americans who internalize them—a personal experience of crisis induced by conflicting principles. For some, this dissonance is resolved by using it to stimulate thinking about the purpose and meaning of life

The Moral Visions of Americans

Moral visions are fundamental beliefs about the location of moral authority (e.g., Jaspers 1953; Sorokin 1957; Eisenstadt 1982; Orrù 1987). For absolutists, the source of moral values and moral judgment is located outside the individual in the “transcendental sphere”—usually considered to be God, but it could be society itself (Durkhiem) or even abstract ideas (Plato). Absolutists believe in a universal moral code that is independent and separate from the individuals it governs. Fletcher (1966) called this a “legalistic” approach because it applies the same rules to all people at all times in all situations.

Relativists locate the source of moral authority in the individual living in this world, the “mundane sphere.” For them, moral authority resides in the self and local situation, making the individual “the final arbiter of truth” (Shanahan 1992:20). According to relativists, moral codes can—and should—vary from person to person, from time to time, and from situation to situation as people struggle with the practical challenges and problems of everyday life. Fletcher’s aptly named *Situation Ethics* (1966) is one of the best known treatments of this moral vision. Relativism is often mistaken for *antinomianism*, literally, *against* laws or norms (Fletcher 1966:22). (Antinomianism is different from anomie, *without* laws or norms.) The antinomian is an anarchist who “enters into the decision-making situation armed with no principles or maxims

whatsoever, to say nothing of *rules*. In every ‘existential moment’ or ‘unique’ situation,” Fletcher (1966:22) describes, “...one must rely upon the situation itself, *there and then*, to provide its ethical solution.”

Absolutism and relativism are a duality, two parts of one conceptual system. Rather than different ways of thinking, they make up “a *single* way of thinking which is subject to an internal tension regarding the location of reality” (Orrù 1987:5). This dual conceptual system is an example of a universal human phenomenon documented by anthropologists, historians, and sociologists —the organization of social thought (and often social institutions) in patterns of opposites (Maybury-Lewis and Almagor 1989). “This [pattern] is reported from so many different parts of the world that it is clearly a kind of system that human beings keep inventing and living by, independently of each other” (Maybury-Lewis 1989:1). Or, as Bell (1978:155) puts it, “only man has created dualities: of spirit and matter, nature and history, the sacred [transcendental sphere] and the profane [mundane sphere].”

The roots of the dual conceptual system of moral visions run deep. Jaspers (1953) argues that the origin of absolutism and relativism and their inherent tension is the “axis of history” over 2,500 years ago (see also Orrù 1987; Seligman 1989). “It is there that we meet with the most deep cut dividing line in history” and the creation of “the fundamental categories within which we still think today” (Jaspers 1953:1-2). A contemporary expression of this dual conceptual system is the “culture war” in America. The ultimate source of this culture war, some say, is the irreconcilable conflict between absolutism and relativism (e.g., Hunter 1991, 1994). Strong advocates of the culture war thesis argue that, over time, America has become a house divided, increasingly polarized,

into two opposed moral camps: absolutists versus relativists. The stakes are high: nothing less than the future of the American way of life. In this culture war, Hunter (1991:42) argues, only one side can win, resulting in the “domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others.” Many social scientists doubt the validity of the culture war argument, but they note that culture war rhetoric is commonplace: “Images of U.S. society as polarized into warring moral camps are increasingly evoked by political leaders, media pundits, and scholars alike” (Davis and Robinson, 1996: 756). Between 1993 and 1996, for example, over 1,500 articles referring to the American culture war appeared in the media (Mouw and Sobel 2001:914)

The World Values Surveys provide a direct measure of moral visions, allowing the moral visions of American to be compared with those of the peoples of many other societies. This measure also offers an empirical test of the culture war claim of polarized moral visions. Absolutism and relativism are indicated by responses to this survey item: “Here are two statements which people sometimes make when discussing good and evil. Which one comes closest to your own point of view? Statement A—There are absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil. These always apply to everyone, whatever the circumstances. Statement B—There can never be absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil. What is good and evil depends entirely upon the circumstances at the time.” Each respondent was presented with the two statements and asked to choose. A respondent could disagree with both statements, but this response had to be volunteered. Those who select Statement A are the absolutists; those who select B are the relativists.

This measure of moral visions is a single dichotomous survey item, and so it is subject to potential concerns about reliability and validity. Usually, the problem of measurement reliability is addressed by creating a scale from multiple items. I would prefer, of course, to have a battery of items about moral visions, but these are available in the World Values Surveys. There are multiple items about religion, which could be combined with the single item on moral visions. However, doing so would confound the distinction between moral visions and religion. Moral visions are not religious beliefs. Moral absolutists may tend to hold strong religious beliefs, but they do not have to. For example, atheists can believe in a transcendental source of moral authority, such as society itself or abstract ideas (Orrù 1987). Thus, a single survey item is better than a scale that conflates religion and moral visions. An alternative way to assess measurement reliability is to use the multiple wave design of the World Values Surveys to measure stability over time (a variant of “test-retest” reliability). This survey item exhibits high test-retest reliability (for details, see Baker 2005).

Another potential criticism of this survey item is that a dichotomous question can create a false appearance of polarization. Demerath and Yang (1997:20) criticize the use of any dichotomous measure because “it is virtually guaranteed to generate polarization when the respondents are asked to identify with one of two opposing ideological positions.” Polarization would be indicated by a more or less even split: 50% absolutists and 50% relativists. This pattern rarely emerges in the four waves of the World Values Surveys. In the 1981–1982 wave, for example, only one society (Northern Ireland) came close to the 50-50 split. In the 1995-1998 wave, only 10 of 65 societies exhibited a

polarized pattern. Thus, polarization is not “virtually guaranteed” by this dichotomous item.

Finally, this measure of moral visions has solid content validity. It clearly distinguishes between the two views of moral authority; it does not explicitly link moral authority to a *specific* source (such as God, society, or the self); and it does not mix religious beliefs (or social attitudes) with moral visions. The most important justification for this measure is theoretical. It was designed *purposely* to tap the dual model of thinking about moral authority. Indeed, a theologian on the original World Values Surveys design team proposed this dichotomous item to capture the dual conceptual system of absolutism and relativism (Inglehart, personal communication).

The moral visions of Americans in 2000 are almost equally divided between absolutism and relativism. As shown in Table 1, 49.2% of Americans agreed that “there are absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil. These always apply to everyone, whatever the circumstances.” About 46.6% said that “there can never be absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil. What is good and evil depends entirely upon the circumstances at the time.” Only 4.2% volunteered that neither statement was true.

Table 1 about here

Figure 1 displays the distribution of moral visions among Americans in each wave of the World Values Surveys. It shows that Americans were divided into approximately equal numbers of absolutists and relativists in 1995 and 1990. In 1981, however, the distribution was quite different: Americans’ views of moral authority were more relativistic than absolutistic, 60% versus 37%. Thus, a shift in moral visions

occurred between 1981 and 1990. Absolutism increased during the decade while relativism declined. (This change is statistically significant at $p < .001$). This change was not confined to specific groups or categories of Americans. A rising tide of absolutism swept over all social classes, age cohorts, men and women, whites and nonwhites, married and not married (for details, see Baker 2005).

Figure 1 about here

These findings from the World Values Surveys are consistent with other sources of data. For example, Wolfe (1998:46-47) reports a similar 50:50 split in his Middle Class Morality Project, based on in-depth interviews and a follow-up survey of a sample of 200 Americans. And, in my 2003 Detroit Area Study, a representative survey of the four million residents of Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb Counties (the greater Detroit metropolitan region), I find a similar pattern: 51.3% agree with Statement A (absolutists) and 45.3% agree with Statement B (relativists). Only 3.3% disagree with both statements.

Comparing the U.S. with other nations underscores the theme of American exceptionalism (see Table 1). America is one of the absolutist nations in the world. Only 17 of 79 nations have a higher proportion of absolutists, and all of these are low-income and developing societies such as Morocco, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Chile, and Peru. Moreover, America has the highest proportion of absolutists of *any* economically advanced democracy. And, it is different from the nations with which it shares a cultural heritage, such as the historically Protestant nations and English speaking nations. Northern Ireland is the closest to the United States (46.9% absolutists versus 49.2% absolutists, respectively). But most historically Protestant nations have

many more relativists than absolutists. For example, over 80% of the citizens of Sweden, Denmark, and Iceland are relativists. Thus, the moral visions of Americans are dramatically unusual. And, as we see next, the moral absolutism of Americans is consistent with the location of America on the traditional/secular-rational values dimension.

America on Two Dimensions of Cultural Variation

Prior research with data from the World Values Surveys has identified distinctive value orientations within and across societies (e.g., Inglehart 1997; Inglehart and Baker 2000; Inglehart and Norris 2003). Two principal dimensions have emerged from this research: traditional versus secular-rational values and survival versus self-expression values. These dimensions are based on factor analysis of the various items shown in Table 2 (Inglehart and Baker 2000). In addition to the specific items in these two scales, a wide range of values, beliefs, and meanings are associated with each dimension (see, e.g., Tables 2 and 3 in Inglehart and Baker 2000). These two cultural dimensions have been replicated with each new wave of the World Values Surveys (e.g., Inglehart and Norris, 2003). They appear to be quite robust.

Table 2 about here

Religion is a prominent feature of the traditional/secular-rational values dimension. Traditional values include strong beliefs in the importance of religion and the importance of God in one's life. Traditionalists attend church regularly, have a great deal of confidence in the country's churches, get comfort and strength from religion and describe themselves as religious people. God, country, and family are tightly connected.

Patriotism is a traditional value. What some call “family values” are a major theme; for example, traditionalists are “pro-life” (against abortion); they believe that children should learn obedience and respect, and that a main goal in life is to make one’s parents proud. Moral absolutists tend to have traditional values. Secular-rational values emphasize the opposite positions on all these topics.

The survival/self-expression dimension taps a fundamentally different value orientation (Table 2). Generally, this orientation includes differences in trust, tolerance of others, subjective well-being, political activism, and self-expression. These self-expression values appear to emerge in post-industrial societies with high levels of existential security, safety, and the satisfaction of material needs (Inglehart and Baker2000). Fogel’s (2000) concepts of “spiritual” or “immaterial” needs, and the “spiritual capital” required for a journey of self-realization, refer to the same value orientation. Once material needs are satisfied and taken for granted, he says, concerns turn to “the struggle for self-realization, the desire to find a deeper meaning in life than the endless accumulation of consumer durables and the pursuit of pleasure, access to the miracles of modern medicine, education not only for careers but for spiritual values, methods of financing an early, fruitful, and long-lasting retirement, and increasing the amount of quality time available for family activities” (Fogel 2000:176-177). At the other end of this value orientation, people whose lives are characterized by uncertainty, insecurity, political and economic turmoil, and low levels of well-being emphasize survival values, such as economic and physical security above all other goals. They feel threatened by foreigners, outgroups, and diversity; they are distrustful and resist cultural change.

These two dimensions can be used to produce a global cultural map (e.g., Inglehart and Baker 2000:29, 35). The most recent map available, which includes the latest survey results for all nations included in the four waves of the World Values Surveys, is shown in Figure 2 (Inglehart and Norris 2003:155). This map shows that America is the most traditional nation among all the historically Protestant nations, and the most traditional of all the English-speaking nations except Ireland. Thirty-one nations on this map are more traditional than the U.S. but all of these are low-income or developing societies from Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. At the same time, the U.S. is one of the most self-expression oriented nations in the world. In fact, only seven nations are more self-expression oriented: Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, Canada, and Iceland. America is an exceptional mix of traditional values and self-expression values. Its position on this map is unique: There is no nation that is more traditional *and* more self-expression oriented at the same time. The space on this map to the right of the U.S. and below it is empty.

Figure 2 about here

America's value system has exhibited both stability and change over time. Since the first wave of the World Values Surveys (1981), the traditional values of Americans have shown remarkable durability. As Figure 3 demonstrates, the U.S. in 1995 (third wave) is in the same position on the traditional/secular-rational values dimension as it was in 1981. The nation's position on this dimension in 2000 (fourth wave) is almost the same, even though many other nations—mostly poor countries—have been added to the coverage of the World Values Surveys (Figure 2). America was one of the most traditional nations in 1981 and remains one of the most traditional almost 20 years later.

In contrast to the stability of America's traditional values, the nation exhibits continuous movement along the survival/self-expression dimension. Since 1981, Americans have become increasingly self-expression oriented. There appears to be an almost perfect linear trend toward self-expression values from 1981 to 2000 (for details, see Baker 2005).

Figure 3 about here

The years from the first World Values Surveys to the latest are a relatively short time span to conclusively evaluate trends, but the lack of movement along the traditional/secular-rational dimension is remarkable, especially since all of America's peers have lost or are losing their traditional values. All historically Protestant nations in the 1981 surveys were less traditional than the United States, such as Britain, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Iceland, and the Netherlands. Since then, all of these cultural peers have shifted even further away from traditional values (Figure 3). The only exception is the Netherlands, but its values were already considerably less traditional than America's in 1981 (Figure 3). Like most of its peers, however, America has become more and more self-expression oriented over the last 20 years. Along the survival/self-expression dimension, America is similar to other historically Protestant nations.

The 2003 Detroit Area Study offers new data on these cultural dimensions, albeit only in a Midwestern region of the United States. In the Detroit Area Study, I replicated the items used to construct the two values scales (Table 2). The data from this survey and the World Values Surveys were combined, weighted so that each nation/region had equal weight, and factor analysis was used to recompute the values for the two

dimensions. The distributions of traditional/secular-rational values and survival/self-expression values for the Detroit region in 2003 and the U.S. in 2000 are similar. Detroit region is located in the same vicinity as the United States, but it is somewhat more traditional and more survival oriented ($p < .05$).

As shown in Figure 4, the nation as a whole and the Detroit region tend to be traditional (the histograms “lean” to the left). Both the nation and the region are almost one standard deviation below the average for all societies included in the World Values Surveys. In contrast, both the nation and the region tend to be more self-expression oriented than survival oriented. Thus, the results from the Detroit Area Study lend support to the national results from the 2000 World Values Survey. These histograms also show, however, that there is variation among Americans along these dimensions. In the next section, I explore how this variation relates to attitudes about the separation of church and state.

Figure 4 about here

America has retained its traditional values over time while it has shifted toward self-expression values. Why have some values changed and others stayed the same? Here, I summarize an answer that I provide in greater detail in Baker (2005). America’s position on the global cultural map is often considered to be anomalous—a society that does not conform to the general tendency for economically advanced societies with a Protestant cultural heritage to be secular-rational and self-expression oriented. I argue, however, that the reason for the nation’s stability on the traditional/secular-rational dimension is that same reason for the rapid shift on the survival/self-expression dimension: America’s cultural heritage. America’s cultural heritage counteracts the usual secularizing effect of economic development, retarding a shift toward secular-

rational values. At the same time, this cultural heritage accelerates the nation's self-expression values, boosting the usual effect of economic development on this dimension.

Intergenerational replacement is a key mechanism of value change, as over 30 years of Eurobarometer data demonstrate (Inglehart 1997). Members of a generation tend to create a common outlook, collective identity, and similar basic values in their formative years —adolescence and early adulthood— which remain fairly stable throughout the life course (Mannheim 1952; Ortega y Gasset 1961; Schuman and Scott 1989; Inglehart 1997). When the formative experiences of newer generations are significantly different from those of older generations, members of the younger cohorts develop values different from those of the older cohorts. Therefore, as the newer cohorts replace the older, the distribution of values in a society shifts over time. Large intergenerational value differences have been documented in, for example, the advanced industrial democracies (Inglehart and Baker 2000). In these societies, the younger generations are much more secular-rational and self-expression oriented than the older ones (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). America is different. The formative experiences of American cohorts are dramatically different (imagine the vastly different experiences of those who grew up in the Great Depression versus those who came of age in the 1960s). But Americans of all ages tend to have traditional values *and* to be self-expression oriented (for details, see Baker 2005). The theory of intergenerational replacement explains value stability and change in many societies, but not in the United States.

There are three reasons why Americans have retained their traditional values as they have become increasingly self-expression oriented. As I elaborate next, these are 1) the establishment of a radically different culture in the early formative years of the

country; 2) the recreation and reproduction of this culture over the years in social, political and economic institutions; and, (3) the critical link between traditional values and the need to preserve the American ideology. Americans have retained their traditional values, I shall argue, because traditional values are congruent with and reinforce the nation's core ideology. Secular-rational values are incongruent with and even threaten the definition of what it means to be American. Self-expression values, however, are congruent and compatible with the nation's culture and institutions, and so a shift from survival to self-expression values is not only possible, but probable.

Americans, says Kingdon (1996:23), "*think differently.*" Thinking differently includes a preference for limited government, a distinctive distrust of authority, and strong religious beliefs. The origins of these values are the first immigrants who dominated early American culture and institutions. "American values," argues Kingdon (1999:58), "are connected to the kinds of people who came here. But the key point is that many of the people who traveled to these shores were systematically and fundamentally different from those who stayed behind in the old countries. They therefore brought ideas about government and politics with them that were systematically different from the ideas of the people who remained" (see, also, Lipset 1996; Fogel 2000).

The first immigrants were religious exiles (e.g., the Puritans and the Pilgrims). They escaped religious and political persecution in Europe, bringing with them a radical spirit of independence, self-reliance, a deep distrust of church hierarchies and state-controlled or state-sponsored religion —and a firm belief in the importance of God. The Protestants who left Europe were fundamentally different from those who remained, and

these early travelers to the New World established dramatically different institutions (Lipset 1996:19-21). For example, the Puritans sought to found a new society, one that would “cleanse the churches of Christ throughout the world by restoring them to the purity and simplicity they had known in the days of the Apostles” (Erikson 1966:v). In contrast to European Protestants, American Protestants established local congregational sects; they became church members by acts of choice, not by birthright. American Protestants sought a direct personal relationship with God, not one mediated by the clergy. Also, American congregations paid their own clergy and self-funded their schools, unlike European Protestant churches where the clergy and schools were paid by the state and subsidized by taxes. American and European Protestants also had different views of human nature. European Protestants saw human beings as innately sinful and weak, and thus were less moralistic, less judgmental, and more forgiving about lapses in conduct. American Protestants, however, were quick to judge misconduct. “The American sects assume the perfectibility of human nature and have produced a moralistic people” (Lipset 1996:20).

The early religious exiles were joined by those who left the Old World for better economic opportunities (Kingdon 1999:60-61). Those who came to pursue economic advancement and achievement tended to push the center of American values and politics “in a more individualistic and antigovernment direction” (Kingdon 1999:61). Generally, these immigrants were more entrepreneurial, more independent, and bigger risk takers than those who stayed behind. Many economic immigrants shared and reinforced the core values of the religious groups that preceded them, but for different reasons. Together, they contributed to the unique constellation of American values —the

American ideology or creed. “Born out of revolution,” writes Lipset (1996:31), “the United States is a country organized around an *ideology* which includes a set of dogmas about the nature of a good society. Americanism, as different people have pointed out, is an ‘ism’ or ideology in the same way that communism or fascism or liberalism are isms. As G. K. Chesterton put it: ‘America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence.’”

How do values originating centuries ago exert influence today? Path dependence is one answer (e.g., Kingdon 1996; Lipset 1996; Inglehart and Baker 2000). This theory says that starting conditions and initial choices send a system down a path of development that is not easily reversed. Kingdon (1996:80) explains: “America started down the path of limited government very early. We started with a distinctive distrust of authority, including governmental authority, that sprang from both the values of the immigrants and the pervasive localism of America. Faithful to and believing in that orientation, the founders deliberately built the country’s fragmented governmental institutions (separation of powers, checks and balances, bicameralism, federalism) so as to limit government. Their design also contained specified limits on government action, as in the Bill of Rights, to be enforced by independent courts. Now that we have gone down the path of limited government for two centuries, we are extremely unlikely to design a wholly different set of institutions from scratch.... Some Americans think that the genius of the founders is their lasting legacy to all of us; others think that we’re all stuck with these unwieldy institutions. Either way, there’s no turning back.”

Path dependence theory helps to explain the durability of America's traditional values. Traditional values were embodied in the nation's early social, economic, and political institutions, and then reinforced and reproduced over time. For example, "cross-cultural differences linked with religion [such as America's early Protestantism] have become part of a national culture that is transmitted by the educational institutions and the mass media of given societies to the people of that nation" (Inglehart and Baker 2000:37). The nation-state is "a key unit of shared experience and its educational and cultural institutions shape the values of almost everyone in that society" (Inglehart and Baker, 2000:37). Socialization into a national culture has a homogenizing effect on the people of a given society, regardless of their religious preferences. Indeed, Etzioni (2001) calls America the "monochrome" society because its diverse peoples share the same American values and aspirations. For example, the values of Protestants and Catholics in America today are quite similar, but quite different from the values of Protestants and Catholics in other nations (see, e.g., Figure 5 in Inglehart and Baker 2000:37).¹

Contemporary expressions of a durable American ideology and its traditional values are clear. Bellah (2000) argues that Protestantism is still the "deep structure" of American culture.² The institutionalization of early Protestant values has produced and continues to reproduce a national culture that is so strong and monolithic that Bellah

¹ Similarly, Hindus in India have more values in common with Muslims in the same nation than they do with Muslims in Nigeria; and, Christians and Muslims in Nigeria have more in common with one another than they do with their religious counterparts elsewhere (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). There are built-in limits to the global convergence of national cultures and economies (Guillén, 2001).

² Numerically, Protestants are still the largest religious group in America. According to a 2003 Gallup poll, 49.4% of Americans say that "Protestant" is their religious preference. The next largest group, Roman Catholics, is 23.7%. The same poll shows that more Protestants (60%) than Catholics (55%) say

(2000) brands it a “monoculture.” America remains one of the most religious nations on earth. For example, only 19 of 75 nations rate higher than the United States on Inglehart and Norris’s (2003:53-55) religiosity scale,³ and all of these are poor or developing countries, such as Uganda, El Salvador, Iran, South Africa, Peru, and Turkey. The U.S. is considerably more religious than all the historically Protestant nations, and more religious than all the English-speaking nations with the exception of Ireland (which is only slightly more religious). The Survey of American Political Culture reports “remarkably high levels of support for the ‘American creed’” (Hunter and Bowman, 1996). Ninety-two percent of respondents “agree that children should be taught that ‘Our founders limited the power of government, so government would not intrude too much into the lives of its citizens.’” Eighty percent “expressed a high degree of ‘support for our system of government’.” And, 96% agree with “the principle that ‘with hard work and perseverance, anyone can succeed in America’ should be taught to children.” The National Opinion Research Center’s study of patriotism in 22 nations finds that Americans are the most patriotic people (Smith and Jarkko 1998).

Symbols of the close connection between God and country abound in American society. For example, “In God We Trust” appears on U.S. currency. The U.S. Supreme Court’s opening invocation includes “God save the United States and this honorable court.” The “Pledge of Allegiance” is recited daily by millions of children in public schools across the country: “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of

that religion is “very important in your own life.” Protestants also attend church more frequently than Catholics, though this difference is not big.

³ This religiosity scale comes from a factor analysis of the proportion of people in each nation “(1) who say that religion is ‘very important’ in their lives, (2) who find comfort in religion, (3) who believe in God, (4) who identify as religious, (5) who believe in life after death, and (6) who attend religious services regularly” (Inglehart and Norris, 2003:54-55).

America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” The U.S. Congress inserted the phrase “under God” in 1952 to distinguish America’s religious values and religious heritage from “Godless communism.” In March 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court heard a case brought by an American atheist who argued that the phrase “under God” was unconstitutional because it violated the separation of church and state. Eighty-seven percent of adult Americans favor keeping the phrase “under God” in the Pledge, according to an Associated Press-Ipsos poll taken a few days before the U.S. Supreme Court heard the case.

Path dependence helps to explain the durability of America’s traditional values but it is not the whole story. Another reason, I argue, is that America’s traditional values play a vital role in the preservation of America’s “imagined community.” Every nation-state is an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) or what Habermas (1998) calls the popular self-consciousness of belonging to a people. This self-consciousness forms “a relation of solidarity between persons who had previously been strangers to one another” (Habermas 1998:111). The solidarity of a nation-state is based on a common heritage: common ancestry, language, religion, history, customs, traditions, and territory. This common cultural heritage, says Habermas (1998:113) produces “the consciousness of belonging to ‘the same’ people, and makes subjects into citizens of a single political community—into members who can feel responsible *for one another*. The nation of the *Volksgeist*, the unique spirit of the people—the first truly *modern* form of collective identity—provided the cultural basis for the constitutional state.”

But America does not have common ancestry, language, religion, history, customs, traditions, and territory (Habermas 1998). It is not, as Lipset (1996) calls it, a

“birthright” community. And so the popular self-consciousness of belonging to a people must stand on another base. For Americans, this foundation is a shared set of ideas and values —an ideology. The relation of solidarity in America is its “civil religion” (Habermas 1998), or what Ralph Waldo Emerson and Abraham Lincoln called America’s “political religion” (Lipset 1996:18). Americans imagine they belong to the “same people” because they believe Americans share the same values. This imagined community overcomes differences in ancestry and ethnic origin, differences in religion, differences in customs, and even differences in language. “Being an American...is an ideological commitment. It is not a matter of birth. Those who reject American values are un-American” (Lipset 1996:31)

Because the foundation of America’s imagined community is a set of ideas and values, its preservation is paramount. Firm beliefs in religion and God, family values, absolute moral authority, national pride, and so on are fundamental to America’s collective identity, to what it means to be American. For Americans, the loss of traditional values is a threat to the nation’s imagined community. It is a direct assault on the nation’s ideological core. The Swedes or the Germans or the Swiss or any birthright nation can lose traditional values and still retain their collective identity because the popular self-consciousness of “a people” does not stand on a base of ideas and values. National identity is not an ideological commitment. With or without traditional values, birthright nations still have their common ancestry, history, religion, language, and customs. But America would not be America if its people lost their traditional values. And, the nation does not have another foundation to fall back on. Therefore, Americans

have retained their traditional values over time, successfully resisting the secularizing forces of affluence and economic development.

Why has the nation shifted toward self-expression values? Value shifts that are *congruent* with the social structure and culture of a nation are more likely to occur than changes that are not. For example, incongruence is one reason why socialism and unionism never caught on in America as they did in Europe. “The American social structure and values foster the free market and competitive individualism, an orientation which is not congruent with class-consciousness, support for socialist or social democratic parties, or a strong trade union movement” (Lipset 1996:108). Self-expression values are congruent with America’s cultural heritage, and so the potential exists for change along the survival/self-expression dimension. But this is just a potential; it is a necessary, but not sufficient cause for value shift. This potential was realized through economic development. As I outline below, culture and economics combined to produce the shift toward self-expression values (for details, see Baker 2004).

Self-expression or what is also called self-realization is “a particularized creative process of individual growth” (Shusterman 1994:396-387). This value orientation is consistent, compatible, and congruent with American culture. For example, individualism, a core American ideal (Lipset, 1996), supports the pursuit of self-realization. Beliefs about human nature encourage self-realization. The Puritans believed that human nature was evil but perfectible and made self-perfection a moral project.⁴ Over time, Americans increasingly adopted the belief that human nature is

4 Every society develops a conception of human nature, with inherently good at one pole and inherently evil at the other. Evil but perfectible falls somewhere in the middle of this continuum (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961).

inherently good—but still in need of perfection. Like their Puritan ancestors, Americans today believe in the importance of pursuing self-development and individual growth. For example, Wuthnow (1998) argues that more and more Americans are engaged in a “spirituality of seeking”—a personal quest for sacred moments and the exploration of new spiritual avenues. Data from the World Values Surveys and Detroit Area Study support his argument. In 1981 and again in 1990, 48% of Americans said they often think about the meaning and purpose of life. In 1995, the figure dropped by two percentage points but then rose dramatically by 2000 to 59%—a twenty year high. In the 2003 Detroit Area Study, 64% of Americans say that they often think about the meaning and purpose of life.

Gallup reports even higher numbers for a similar survey item: “How often have you thought about the basic meaning and value of your life during the past two years—a lot, a fair amount, or only a little?” 69% of Americans said “a lot” in 1998 (Gallup, Jr. and Lindsay, 1999). The proportion of Americans who often think about the meaning and purpose of life is higher than the global average, and higher than the proportion in almost all economically advanced democracies, in each wave of the World Values Surveys (see, e.g., Inglehart and Baker 2000:48).

God is very important in the lives of Americans. For example, 58% of Americans in 2000 rated the importance of God in their lives as “10” on a 10-point scale. This figure is a 20-year high, up from 50% in 1981, 48% in 1990, and 50% in 1995 (Inglehart and Baker, 2000:47). Sixty-three percent of respondents in the 2003 Detroit Area Study rated the importance of God in their lives as “10.” The majority of Americans attend religious services at least once a month. In 2000, for example, 60% of Americans said

they attended religious services at least once a month, the same percentage as in 1981. Forty-seven percent of Detroit region residents attend religious services at least once a month. This figure is surprising, given how important God is in their lives. Overall, the strength of religious beliefs (importance of God in one's life) and religious practices (attending religious services) are marks of American exceptionalism. All nations with a Protestant heritage, and almost all economically advanced democracies, report much lower figures. Generally, only low-income and developing nations report higher figures than the U.S. (e.g., Inglehart and Baker 2000:46-47).

America's culture heritage is fertile ground for a shift toward self-expression values. Culture provides the potential. Economic development supplies the means. Like the peoples of most societies who have come to experience and enjoy existential security, material affluence, peace, and safety, Americans have become focused increasingly on self-expression.⁵ Because the same cultural heritage is inhospitable to secular-rational values, and the preservation of traditional values is essential for sustaining America's imagined community, Americans have resisted the usual secularizing effects of economic development. Therefore, America's position on the global cultural map—like the position of each country—is influenced by culture *and* economics (Figure 2). America's position on the survival/self-expression dimension is a result of America's culture and economic development working together and pushing in the same direction. The nation's position on the traditional/self-expression dimension is a result of the two forces pushing

⁵ The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 jolted Americans' sense of safety and security, but has not seem to have had a lasting impact on America's values. Many Americans have reported that their sense of personal safety and security have been shaken (Traugott, Groves, and Kennedy, 2002), and a Pew survey right after the attacks showed dramatically higher levels of religious belief and national pride. Six months later, however, Pew reports that religious belief and national pride had returned to their pre-9/11 levels (Religion and Public Life Survey, 2002).

in opposite directions, with culture suppressing the secularizing effects of economic development.

Moral Visions, Cultural Values, and Socio-Political Attitudes among Americans

Moral visions, cultural values, and attitudes are related in what I call a “hierarchy of beliefs.” This three-level hierarchy is illustrated in Figure 5. Moral visions are an overarching framework. Religious-cultural values are the middle tier, residing under the moral visions. As Geertz (1973:126) argues, religion “objectivizes moral and aesthetic preferences.” Religious-cultural values, in turn, are the framework for social and political attitudes. For example, “[religious] orthodoxy provides an overarching moral framework from which individuals may derive positions on specific policy-related issues” (Davis and Robinson 1996:769).

Figure 5 about here

This hierarchy suggests that moral visions have both direct and indirect effects on attitudes. Elsewhere I analyze both direct and indirect effects (Baker 2005). Here, I focus on the total effects of both moral visions and the two cultural dimensions on socio-political attitudes, specifically, attitudes about the separation of church and state.⁶ Opinions about the separation of church and state are interesting to consider because they are subject to an internal tension: On the one hand, the separation of church and state is

⁶ For analyses of the effects of moral visions and the two dimensions on other attitudes, such as “economic ethics” and “family values,” see Baker (2005).

so important that it is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution.⁷ On the other hand, the connection between God and country is exceptionally strong in American culture. This tension produces continual debates about the proper role of government in legislating religion and continual testing of the limits placed on the government by the Constitution (such as the case brought before the U.S. Supreme Court in March 2004 to ban the phrase “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance).

The 2000 World Values Surveys contain four items about the relationship between government and religion. (These items were not included in the three prior waves.) (1) “It would be better for [America] if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office.” (2) “Politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office.” (3) “Religious leaders should not influence how people vote in elections.” (4) “Religious leaders should not influence government decisions.” Moral visions and the two cultural dimensions are significantly related with each of these attitudes, controlling for a variety of socio-demographic variables (Table 3). Moral absolutists favor less separation. They believe it would be better for the America if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office, and that politicians who are atheists are unfit for public office. Moral relativists take the opposite position on each of these expressions of church-state separation. Relativists believe that religious leaders should not influence how people vote in elections, and that religious leaders should not influence government decisions. Absolutists take opposite positions.

⁷ The First Amendment reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

Table 3 about here

Given the religious content of traditional values (Table 2), Americans with traditional values should favor less separation of church and state. The results show that they do (Table 3). Traditionalists believe that atheists are unfit for office and that it would be better for America if religious people held office. Secular-rationalists take opposite positions. Secular-rationalists believe that religious leaders should not influence how people vote or influence government decisions. Traditionalists take opposite positions. Americans who are survival oriented favor less church-separation; those who are self-expression oriented favor more. The reasons may be that Americans who are survival oriented interpreted less separation to mean greater economic and physical security, while those who are self-expression oriented interpret more separation as less restraint on freedom of expression.

Moral visions exert their force on attitudes directly and indirectly. Table 3 reports the direct effect of moral visions on each of the four opinions about church-state separation, controlling for the two cultural dimensions and various socio-demographics. But moral visions are also significantly associated with each of the two dimensions (as well as with other indicators of religious values and practices⁸). Absolutists tend to hold traditional values and to be survival oriented, controlling for various socio-demographics. Conversely, relativists tend to hold secular-rational values and to be self-expression oriented, controlling for the same socio-demographics (for details, see Baker, 2005). Thus, moral visions influence attitudes through three paths: 1) a direct path (absolutists favor closer ties between religion and politics, compared with relativists); 2) an indirect

path via the traditional/secular-rational dimension (absolutists hold traditional values, and traditionalists favor closer ties, compared with secular-rationalists); and 3) an indirect path via the survival/self-expression dimension (absolutists tend to be survival-oriented, and those with this orientation favor closer ties between church and state, compared with relativists).⁹

These findings demonstrate that the three levels of the hierarchy of beliefs (Figure 5) are interlinked. Moral visions form a canopy over religious-cultural values and attitudes. The dual conceptual system of absolutism and relativism has direct effects on religious-cultural values and both direct and indirect effects on attitudes. Religious-cultural values have direct effects on attitudes. Together, differences in beliefs about moral authority and differences in value orientations help to explain variation among Americans in their attitudes about a defining principle of American society: the separation of church and state.

Cultural Contradictions and the Search for Meaning

The analyses and arguments above make the case that American exceptionalism occurs in two ways. First, America's value system is unusually absolutist and traditional. It is more absolutist and more traditional than virtually all economically advanced democracies and even more so than the majority of nations in the world. Second,

⁸ Other analyses show that moral visions and religious values and practices are closely connected. For example, absolutists are significantly more likely than relativists to believe in God, the soul, Heaven, Hell, and life after death (see Table 3.2, in Baker, 2005).

⁹ The indirect effect of moral visions on attitudes is stronger through the traditional/secular-rational dimension than it is through the survival/self-expression dimension, but both indirect paths are significant (see Table 3.13, in Baker, 2004).

America's value system is unusual because it combines traditional *and* self-expression values. It is a mixed system. A mixed system contains cultural contradictions with prevailing principles that provide contrary guides to conduct. For example, the "cultural contradictions of capitalism" arise from the conflict of principles in economy and culture (Bell 1978). On one side, the principle of "efficiency" in a capitalist economy demands "self-control and delayed gratification, of purposeful behavior in the pursuit of well-defined goals" (Bell 1978:xvi). On the other side, culture dictates "self-expression and self-gratification" (Bell 1978:xvi). The principles of efficiency and self-expression, Bell (1978:xvii) argues, "now lead people in contrary directions." Similarly, I argue that America's mixed value system—traditional values and self-expression values—contains cultural contradictions and contrary guides to conduct. Obedience to an absolute, external, transcendental authority (God and country) is the principle behind traditional values. Obedience to a mundane source of moral authority (the self) is the principle behind self-expression values. These two principles lead Americans in contrary directions.

Americans who internalize the cultural contradictions of traditional and self-expression values and their contrary guides to conduct experience cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a feeling of psychological distress. It can be caused by a discrepancy between two beliefs, or between behavior and belief. According to dissonance theory, a person who experiences cognitive dissonance is motivated to reduce it by changing beliefs, behaviors, or both. For example, one could reduce the cognitive dissonance caused by the contradictions of traditional and self-expression values by abandoning religious values (change in beliefs) or by attending religious services less

often (change in behavior). These dissonance-reduction strategies may be difficult to implement. For example, social sanctions and networks can effectively prevent one from going to religious services less frequently. It is possible, I suggest, that the cognitive dissonance caused by America's mixed value system could be managed in a different way, that is, by thinking often about the meaning and purpose of life.

To test this possibility, I created a measure of "value incongruence" that compares a person's location on the traditional/secular-rational values dimension with the person's location on the survival/self-expression values dimension (see Baker, 2005, for details). Value incongruence is the extent to which a person holds contradictory values, such as traditional values coupled with self-expression values, or secular-rational values coupled with survival values. Value congruence is the extent to which a person holds compatible values, such as traditional values with survival values, or secular-rational values with self-expression values. American society, on average, exhibits value incongruence (traditional and self-expression values) and so the "mainstream" form of value incongruence for individuals is the same. However, some Americans experience the other form of value incongruence (secular-rational and survival values), while still others experience the two forms of value congruence. The measure of value incongruence is a continuous variable, where 0 indicates complete value congruence, negative scores indicate the mainstream form of value incongruence (traditional and self-expression values), and positive scores indicate the other form of value incongruence (secular-rational and survival values). The magnitude of a score, positive or negative, indicates the extent of the discrepancy between a person's locations on the two values dimensions.

Generally, Americans who have internalized the mainstream form of value incongruence are significantly more likely to often think about the meaning and purpose of life, compared to those with the alternative form of value incongruence, even when holding constant the effects of moral visions and socio-demographics (Table 4). Moral visions also have significant effects. Absolutists are more likely than relativists to often think about the meaning and purpose of life, controlling for the two value dimensions and socio-demographic variables. Why do absolutists who hold traditional and self-expression values tend to think often about the meaning and purpose of life? It may be that the struggle to reconcile conflicting guides to conduct —obedience to a transcendental moral authority which comes with absolutism and traditional values versus obedience to the self which comes with self-expression values— stimulates thinking about the meaning and purpose of life. In contrast, a survival orientation, coupled with the principle of obedience to oneself that comes with secular-rational values and relativism, may foster a focus on the here-and-now of everyday life in the mundane world.

Table 4 about here

The gap between America's locations on the two value dimensions has been widening over time as the nation retains its traditional values but continues to move toward self-expression values. If this trend continues, the cultural contradictions in American life will become greater, and more and more Americans hold a mix of traditional and self-expression values. If so, then the proportion of Americans who often think about the meaning and purpose of life will rise over time as well.

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to the theme of American exceptionalism by examining America's moral visions, value orientations, and socio-political attitudes. Moral visions are worldviews about the location of moral authority. Absolutists locate the source in the transcendental sphere (God or society); relativists locate it in the mundane sphere (the self). Americans are exceptionally absolutist. Comparing the proportions of absolutists and relativists in the United States with a large number of societies demonstrates that America is one of the most absolutist nations on earth. Examining the United States over time shows that the proportion of Americans who are absolutists has been increasing. Only one of three Americans was absolutist in 1981, but in 2000 it is one of two. The high proportion of absolutists the United States ranks it alongside poor and developing countries.

America's locations on two value dimensions —traditional versus secular-rational values and survival versus self-expression values— is also unusual. The nation is exceptionally traditional. Is more traditional than other economically advanced democracies (with the exception of Ireland), more traditional than all nations with a Protestant heritage, and more traditional than the majority of nations in the world. Only poor and developing nations have more traditional values. Like most economically advanced democracies, however, the United States has become increasingly self-expression oriented over time. America is exceptional in two ways: its stable traditional values are exceptional, and it is has become an exceptional mix of traditional and self-expression values.

The reasons why Americans have retained their traditional values but have become increasingly self-expression oriented are 1) the establishment of a radically different culture in the early formative years of the country; 2) the recreation and reproduction of this culture over the years in social, political and economic institutions; and, 3) the critical link between traditional values and preservation of the ideological foundation of America's imagined community. Self-expression values are consistent, compatible, and congruent with America's culture and its religious-cultural heritage. Therefore, the nation could move rapidly along the survival/self-expression values dimension as the country developed economically and more and more Americans experienced existential security, material affluence, and safety. But the same culture and religious-cultural heritage are inhospitable to secular-rational values. From its beginning until now, American culture has been based on a close connection between two sources of transcendental moral authority: God and country. In America, these sources provide clear moral guidelines about what is right and wrong. These guidelines always apply to everyone, whatever the circumstances. Of course, Americans hold and apply these moral values in varying degrees, they have innumerable lapses in conduct, and the validity of the two transcendental sources are continually debated and contested. For example, Americans who are absolutist and traditional support closer ties between religion and government, while those who are relativist and secular-rational want more separation between church and state. But all of these differences take place in a cultural context that, at its core, is absolutist and traditional. Preserving this core sustains America's imagined community—its popular self-consciousness of belonging to “an American people.”

Most Americans perceive a crisis of values, as I document in Baker (200). Many believe that the nation has or is losing its traditional values, that it is in moral decline, that America has become a land of relativists, and that it is hopelessly divided. For example, in the 1993 and 1994 General Social Survey of the U.S., 62% said, “Americans are greatly divided when it comes to the most important values.” About 86% of Americans agreed that, “there was a time when people in this country felt they had more in common and shared more values than Americans do today,” according to 1995 poll by Princeton Survey Associates (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson, 1996:63). Fifty-five percent of Americans felt that religion was “losing its significance” as an influence on American life, reports a Pew survey conducted in spring 2001. This percentage dropped right after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, but rose to 52% in March 2002 (Religion and Public Life Survey, 2002). In the same March 2002 survey, 75% of Americans said “no” to the question, “Do you think people in general today lead as good lives —honest and moral— as they used to?” In a May 2003 Gallup poll, 77% of Americans rated the “overall state of moral values in this country today” as “only fair” or “poor,” and 67% said they “think the state of moral values in the country” is “getting worse.” The “culture war” debates are another expression of the pervasive perception of moral decline, discord, and dissension. As described above, proponents of the culture war thesis says that the Americans are divided into two irreconcilably opposed moral camps — absolutists versus relativists— and that the members of these camps hold vastly different religious values and attitudes about social issues and policies (e.g., Hunter 1991; Guinness 1993; Himmelfarb 2001).

There is a wide reality-perception gap in America. The findings in this chapter and elsewhere (Baker 2005) show that America has not lost its traditional values. America was and remains one of the most traditional nations on earth. Religious practices and beliefs remain strong, much stronger than they are in most economically advanced democracies. Americans have not become relativists. To the contrary, absolutism is on the rise. America today is one of the most absolutist nations on earth. The 50:50 split of absolutists and relativists appears to support the culture war claim of opposed moral camps, but this division does not translate into two groups with widely different religious values and social attitudes. On the contrary, Americans tend to hold traditional values (e.g., see Figure 4). Moral visions are related to value orientations and to social and political attitudes, but the links between levels in the hierarchy of beliefs (Figure 5) are not strong enough to conclude that the culture war thesis is correct. There are some differences between absolutists and relativists, but they are not that great. Generally, Americans have a lot in common and share many important values, beliefs, and attitudes (see, also, DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson, 1996).

What explains the reality-perception gap in America? Why do Americans perceive a crisis of values? In the conclusion of this chapter, I can only sketch the answer I develop and support in detail elsewhere (Baker, 2005). First, there is evidence that most societies experience cycles of crisis. Technological and economic transformations drive these cycles by disrupting the preexisting social order, destabilizing culture, and creating crises of meaning (e.g., Castells 2000; Fogel 2000). America appears to be in the transition phase of such a cycle, driven by the revolution in information technologies (Castells 2000) and the acceleration of the “technophysio

evolution of human life” brought about by breakthroughs in several areas, including the “extension of control of human biology, particularly in the fields of reproductive technology and organ transplantation” (Fogel 2000:44). Crisis is the personal experience of many who are witnessing, participating in, and sometimes suffering from this transition. This personal experience may be labeled a “crisis of values” even when traditional values have not been lost and most Americans continue to share important values and beliefs.

Second, some values have changed though traditional values have not: Americans have become increasingly self-expression oriented. Stable traditional values coupled with continuous movement toward self-expression values produces a widening gap between locations on the two dimensions. This widening gap represents increasing cultural contradictions and contradictory guides to action. Though Americans have retained their traditional values and absolutist moral visions, they are pulled increasingly in different directions: obedience to a transcendental moral authority (from traditional values) and obedience to a mundane moral authority (from self-expression values). This tension appears as a crisis of values. For some Americans, it is resolved by using it to stimulate thinking about the about the purpose and meaning of life.

Finally, I believe the “crisis of values” serves a rhetorical function. Traditional values are a base of America’s imagined community, and so their preservation is paramount for sustaining a sense of collective identity. Repeated warnings, public alarm, and political and intellectual debates about the loss of traditional values (or a culture war) serve to remind Americans of the values and ideals that make them who they are. A function of deviance is to maintain “a sense of mutuality among the people of a

community by supplying a focus for group feeling. Like a war, a flood, or some other emergency, deviance makes people more alert to the interests they share in common and draws attention to those values which constitute the ‘collective conscience’ of the community” (Erikson, 1966:4; Durkeim, 1958, 1960). America’s “crisis of values” affirms and reinforces the ideological core of the nation’s imagined community —the values that define “who we are.”

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Table 1. Moral Visions by Nation, World Values Surveys

Society	Absolutists	Neithe r	Relativists	Society	Absolutist s	Neithe r	Relativists
Morocco	78.0	3.3	18.7	Slovakia	36.4	9.4	54.1
Ghana	69.6	6.5	23.9	Italy	36.4	13.2	50.5
Tanzania	68.7	4.2	27.1	China	36.2	9.1	54.4
S. Africa	62.8	3.3	33.9	Domn. Rep	35.8	7.9	56.3
Uganda	58.9	3.9	37.2	Lithuania	34.9	5.5	59.6
Georgia	58.9	3.2	37.9	Uruguay	33.9	5.9	60.2
				W.			
Vietnam	58.4	6.3	35.3	Germany	33.9	4.4	61.7
Zimbabwe	57.3	3.5	39.2	Bulgaria	33.3	6.8	60.0
Azerbaijan	56.7	6.1	37.3	Croatia	32.2	4.5	63.4
Philippines	55.2	0.9	43.9	Belgium	30.7	6.2	63.1
Macedonia	55.1	6.7	38.2	India	30.0	8.2	61.8
Bosnia	53.7	7.3	39.0	Estonia	29.9	8.2	61.9
Chile	53.0	3.4	43.6	Finland	29.3	4.7	66.0
Peru	52.8	4.1	43.1	Norway	29.1	3.6	67.3
Tambov	51.5	3.8	44.7	Switzerland	28.4	8.6	63.0
Poland	50.8	3.6	45.6	Taiwan	28.0	4.7	67.3
Brazil	49.2	0.1	50.8	Valencia	27.8	2.8	69.4
U.S.	49.2	4.2	46.6	Netherlands	26.9	4.1	69.0
Albania	49.1	12.1	38.9	Galicia	26.2	3.7	70.1
Montenegro	48.9	10.9	40.1	France	24.9	7.5	67.6
El Salvador	48.8	6.2	45.0	Belarus	24.8	5.3	69.9
Malta	48.7	3.1	48.3	Czech rep	23.5	6.3	70.2
				Luxembour			
Bangladesh	47.7	1.7	50.6	g	23.3	7.7	69.0
N. Ireland	46.9	5.1	48.1	Greece	22.6	7.0	70.5
Serbia	46.5	8.5	45.0	Basque	22.4	7.0	70.6
Andalusia	45.2	4.3	50.5	Slovenia	21.9	13.0	65.1
Singapore	45.2	1.4	53.4	Austria	20.3	6.4	73.3
Puerto Rico	44.9	3.0	52.2	Japan	19.2	11.5	69.3
Spain	43.7	5.9	50.4	Sweden	15.8	3.2	81.0
Ukraine	42.9	3.1	54.1	Hungary	15.4	9.1	75.5
Canada	42.4	2.4	55.2	Denmark	10.4	4.3	85.3
New Zealand	42.4	12.1	45.5	Iceland	9.0	2.8	88.2
Australia	41.7	2.5	55.7				
Britain	41.5	4.8	53.8				
Armenia	41.0	6.3	52.7				
Latvia	41.0	4.9	54.1				
Mexico	40.9	5.7	53.4				
Venezuela	40.9	9.4	49.7				
Moldova	39.7	5.2	55.1				
Romania	39.5	5.7	54.8				
Portugal	39.0	3.7	57.3				
Ireland	38.8	9.3	51.9				
E. Germany	38.8	15.4	45.8				
Russia	38.6	3.5	57.9				
Argentina	38.6	4.0	57.4				
Colombia	38.0	2.9	59.1				

S. Korea	37.0	0.0	63.0
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Table 2. Two Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Variation: Nation-level analysis

	<u>Factor loadings</u>
<i>Traditional vs. Secular-Rational Values*</i>	
TRADITIONAL VALUES EMPHASIZE THE FOLLOWING:	
God is very important in respondent's life	.91
It is more important for a child to learn obedience and religious faith than independence and determination [Autonomy index]	.89
Abortion is never justifiable	.82
Respondent has strong sense of national pride	.82
Respondent favors more respect for authority	.72
(SECULAR-RATIONAL VALUES EMPHASIZE THE OPPOSITE)	
<i>Survival vs. Self-Expression Values**</i>	
SURVIVAL VALUES EMPHASIZE THE FOLLOWING:	
Respondent gives priority to economic and physical security over self expression and quality of life [4-item Materialist/Postmaterialist Values Index]	.86
Respondent describes self as not very happy	.81
Homosexuality is never justifiable	.80
Respondent. has not and would not sign a petition	.78
You have to be very careful about trusting people	.56
(SELF-EXPRESSION VALUES EMPHASIZE THE OPPOSITE)	

Note: The original polarities vary. The above statements show how each item relates to a given dimension, based on factor analysis with varimax rotation.

Source: From 65 societies surveyed in the 1990-1991 and 1995-1998 World Values Surveys. This table is based on Table 1 in Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values." *American Sociological Review* 65:19-51 (2000)

*Explains 44 percent of the cross-national variation.

Table 3. OLS Coefficients from Regression of Attitudes about Church-State Separation on Moral Visions and Two Dimensions of Cultural Variation, Controlling for Sociodemographic Variables, United States, World Values Surveys, 2000.

Independent Variables	Politicians who do not believe in God are unfit for public office.	Religious leaders should not influence how people vote in elections.	It would be better for America if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office.	Religious leaders should not influence government decisions.
<i>Moral Visions</i>				
Absolutism	-.220***	.243***	-.326***	.238***
<i>Cultural Indices</i>				
Traditional/Secular-Rational Values	.465***	-.310***	.555***	-.366***
Survival/Self-Expression Values	.321***	-.007	.287***	-.199***
<i>Sociodemographics</i>				
Age	.001	-.007***	.004*	-.007**
Race	.192**	.266***	.001	.178*
Gender	.237***	-.004	.122*	-.136*
Marital status	.002	.006	-.002	-.001
Social class	.008*	-.007	.006	-.005*
Education	.001	.007***	-.001	.008***
Protestant	-.157	.006	-.255***	.122
Other religion	-.146	-.006	-.001	-.008
<i>Constant</i>	2.375***	1.147**	2.652***	1.296**
Adjusted R sq.	.21	.10	.32	.14
N of observations	1198	1200	1198	1195

Notes:

See Appendix for definitions of all variables.

Coefficients reported are unstandardized OLS regression estimates.

Omitted category is unmarried, nonwhite, female, and Catholic.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed test for moral visions).

Source: Table 3.7 in Wayne Baker, *America's Crisis of Values* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

Table 4. Binary Logit Coefficients from Regression of Thinking Often About the Meaning and Purpose of Life on Value Incongruence, Controlling for Moral Visions and Sociodemographic Variables, United States, World Values Surveys, 2000.

Independent Variables	Often think about meaning and purpose of life (Excluding value incongruence)	Often think about meaning and purpose of life (For value incongruence, left of zero vs. right of zero)	Often think about meaning and purpose of life (For value incongruence, left tail vs. right tail)
<i>Value Incongruence</i>			
Traditional and self-expression values [†]	---	.224	.437***
<i>Moral Visions</i>			
Absolutism	.585***	.603***	.335*
<i>Sociodemographics</i>			
Age	.128**	.109**	.050
Race	-.971***	-1.060***	-.927***
Gender	-.345**	-.316**	-.342*
Marital status	-.257*	-.324**	-.192
Social class	-.063	.065	.105
Education	.072*	.041	-.025
Protestant	.080	.022	-.179
Other religion	.020	-.038	-.182
Constant	-.943	.446	1.004
Nagelkerke pseudo R sq.	.09	.11	.09
N of observations	1011	958	478

Notes:

See Appendix for definition of all variables.

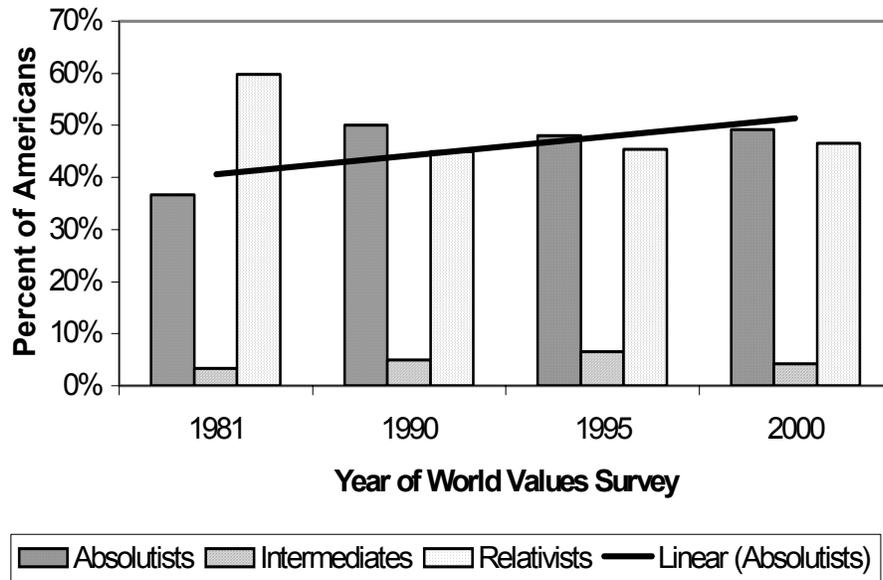
[†] Value incongruence = 1 if a person tends to have traditional and self-expression values. For the first column, this is left of 0 in the distribution in Figure 4.7. For the second column, this is the 25 percentile.

Omitted category is unmarried, nonwhite, female, and Catholic.

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

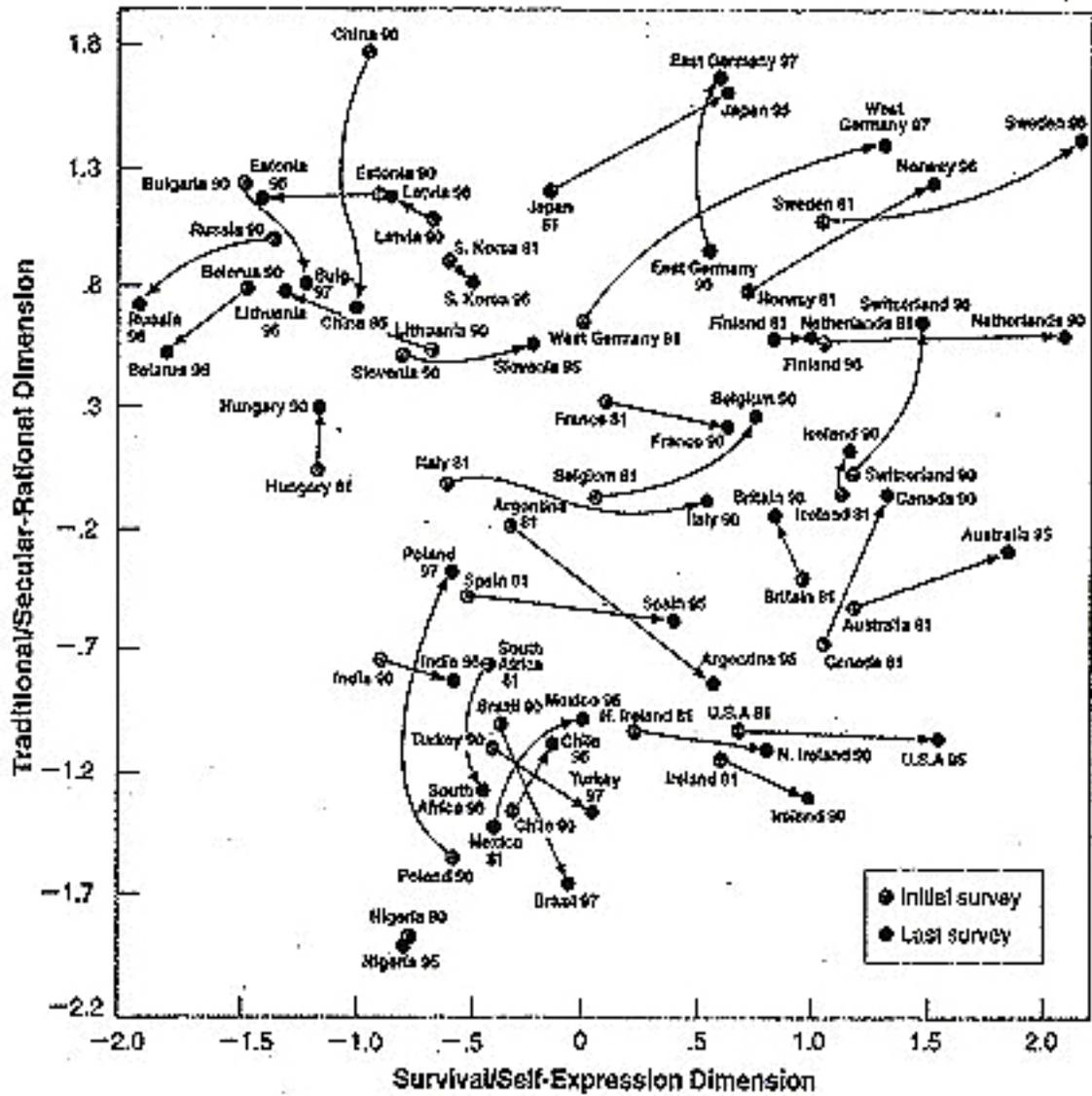
Source: Table 5.8 in Wayne Baker, *America's Crisis of Values* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

Figure 1. Distribution of the Moral Visions of Americans, by Year.



Source: Figure 3.5 in Wayne E. Baker, *America's Crisis of Values* (Princeton University Press 2005). Based on data from the World Values Surveys 1981, 1990, 1995, and 2000

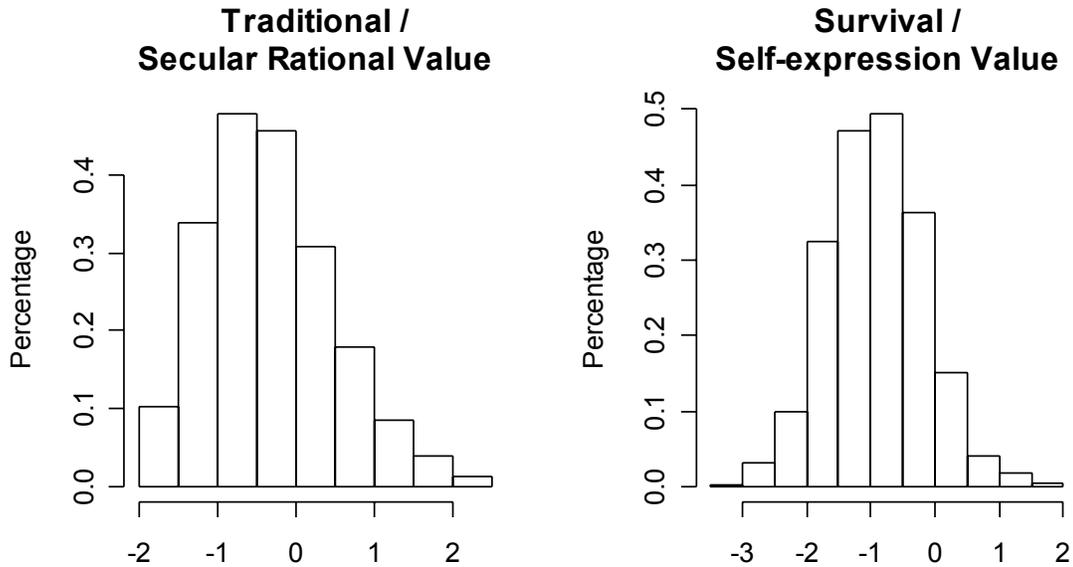
Figure 3. Change Over Time in Location on Two Dimensions of Cross Cultural Variation for 38 Societies



Source: Figure 6 in Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E. Baker, "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values." *American Sociological Review* 65:19-51 (2000)

Figure 4. Percentage Distributions of Traditional/Secular-Rational Values and Survival/Self-Expression Values for the United States (2000 World Values Surveys) and the Greater Detroit Region (2003 Detroit Area Study).

United States (2000)



Detroit Region (2003)

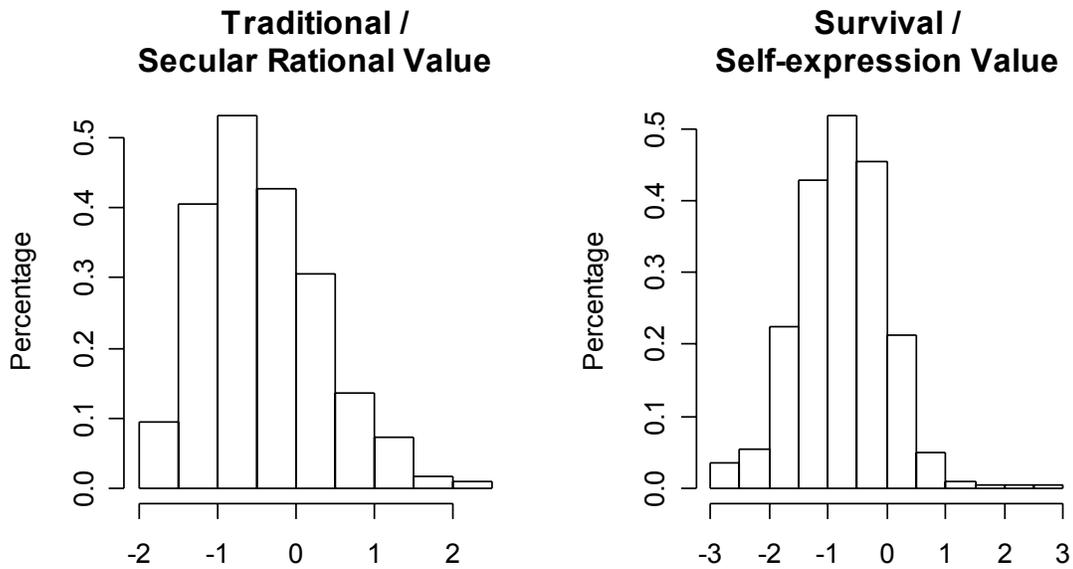
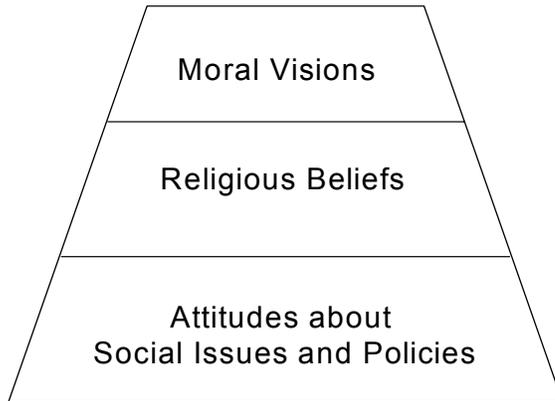


Figure 5. The Hierarchy of Beliefs



Source: Figure 3.2 in Wayne Baker, *America's Crisis of Values* (Princeton University Press, 2005).