

EUROPE'S MORAL BELIEFS

Loek Halman

University of Tilburg and the Centre for Contextual Hermeneutics at Stellenbosch University

1. Introduction

The decline of traditional, institutional religion is often assumed to have had major consequences for morality in contemporary society. Moral convictions have, for a long period in history, been guided by what the churches proclaimed as good and bad. However, people in modern, secularized, and above all, highly individualized society, are supposed to be free and autonomous individuals who do not automatically follow the prescriptions and rules of a traditional, authoritarian institution like the church. Their independence points to a diversity of moral sources (Taylor, 1989: 401).

Thus, it is rather popular to assert that modern society is experiencing a decline in morality. The increased emphasis on the individual is often considered a threat to collectively shared moral views, ultimately leading to selfishness, egotism and so on. As Wilson writes: 'If modern man had taken seriously the main intellectual currents of the last century or so, he would have found himself confronted by the need to make moral choices when the very possibility of making such choices had been denied. God is dead or silent, reason suspect or defective, nature meaningless or hostile. As a result, man is adrift on an uncharted sea, left to find his moral bearings with no compass and no pole star, and so able to do little more than utter personal preferences, bow to historical necessity, or accept social conventions' (Wilson, 1997: 5).

According to some, the unbridled pursuit of selfishness and personal gains undermines collective solidarity and citizenship, and ultimately lead to social dissolution and isolation. Individual autonomy does not allow society to interfere with people's personal lives and their decisions, and since morality represents a voice of society (Poole, 1991: 134), it has become less self-evident in modern individualized society to accept the prevailing collective moral principles. MacIntyre, among others, argued that modern, individualized society, lacks shared moral principles. Since there is no longer a valid rational justification of objective moral standards, there are no such standards in contemporary society (MacIntyre, 1981: 18). Modern, individualized people are, to a large extent, independent of society, and are no longer forced to accept a public order of standards and evaluations. Bellah and his associates warned against the cancerous growing of individualism (Bellah et al., 1986: vii), destroying social commitment and consensus on moral issues. In a society where each individual has become his own moral guide there are no rigid moral standards because they are seen as interfering 'with one's freedom and enjoyment of life' (Bellah et al., 1986: 77).

In this paper, we focus on moral convictions in contemporary Europe. Although, the process of secularization occurs in all European countries, it does not mean that all societies are equally secular. As a result, varieties in moral beliefs are to be expected. It will be argued that more secular countries should have a less severe morality. Further, it will be argued that since religion has become differentiated from other domains of life, religious orientations are no longer strongly associated with people's moral views. In more traditional settings, both religion and morality were closely connected, and the waning of the dominant position of religion in modernizing society fostered the establishment of a 'new morality' or 'permissive morality' (Wilson, 1982: 86). Since the moral guidance of the churches and religion is less self-evident and under heavy pressure, it can be assumed that people's religious orientations are no longer, or less strongly, linked to their moral views. Thus, it can be expected that the more secular a country is, the weaker its religious orientations will be associated with moral views.

The inclusion of Central and Eastern European countries in the European Values Study enables us to further explore the impact of various economic and political regimes on morality. However, it is difficult to make clear predictions on the expected outcomes of such comparisons, for detailed information on these Eastern and Central European countries is scarce or even lacking. On the one hand, it can be argued that because Soviet ideology severely suppressed religion in Central and Eastern European societies, these societies will be more secular, at least officially. On the other hand, modernization processes, like individualization, did not occur in the same way as in Western societies. For many people in Central and Eastern Europe, the adherence to certain values will be more a matter of tradition, whereas in countries of the Western world it is expected to be mainly based in personal choices and considerations. Morality will thus be less personal and more traditional in Eastern European countries than in Western European countries.

However, just as there will be differences between countries in Western Europe, 'intra-Eastern European' differences are to be expected, since the starting points of modernization are not the same in all Eastern European countries and, further, these countries experienced distinct authoritarian regimes. People in the Czech Republic, for instance, have been exposed to more influences of modernization and for a longer period than other populations in Eastern Europe (Gunst, 1989; Stokes, 1989; Crawford, 1996).

The structure of this paper is as follows. In Section 2 the notions of increased individualization and levels of individualism and the assumed repercussions for morality are discussed. Section 3 deals with the measurement on morality as it was available in the European Values Study. Section 4 examines the cross-national varieties in moral beliefs in Eastern and Western Europe and explores the impact of religion on morality. In Section 5, we explore the idea that secular societies are less strict morally, while people living in more religious contexts are more strict; we also investigate whether church involvement has an impact on moral convictions in more religious contexts. In Section 6, we focus on the question whether there is a cleavage between Catholics and Protestants, not only in their moral beliefs, but also in terms of relationships between people's religious beliefs and their moral outlooks. In Section 7, we present some recent shifts in morality in Western countries assuming that people have become less strict. Finally, in Section 9, the results are summarized and some conclusions are drawn.

2. Individualization, secularization, and morality

A major theme in contemporary theories of secularization is a religious decline which is assumed to manifest itself in various ways. Most often, however, evidence for the religious decline is found in the decreasing levels of church attendance and adherence to traditional institutional religious beliefs. Another dimension of the religious decline concerns the decreasing impact of religion on other domains of human life. It is assumed that religious authority structures are no longer able 'to control societal-level institutions, meso-level organizations, and individual-level ... behaviours' (Yamane, 1997: 15). With regard to the second component of secularization mentioned above, i.e., the impact of religion on social behavior, modernization processes like specialization and differentiation are assumed to have resulted in a functionally differentiated society in which religion is one 'subsystem alongside other subsystems, and religion's overarching claims are losing their relevance' (Dobbelaere, 1993: 24). Such a decline in the importance of the religious factor is further presumed to be related to the process of individualization, the process by which people have become free and autonomous and no longer automatically take for granted the prescriptions and rules of a traditional institution like the church.

The process of individualization can be understood as making people increasingly free to

decide for themselves as autonomous individuals how to behave and which values they prefer. People are increasingly guided in their decisions by ideas of personal happiness, self-realization, and an immediate gratification of needs, at the cost of collective authority. Beliefs and convictions are no longer dominated and prescribed by tradition and traditional, particularly religious, institutions, but increasingly rooted in personal choices and individual considerations. People's individual autonomy and self-fulfilment are given top priority (Crittenden, 1992: 3). The individual's judgment of what is good and evil, what is right and wrong, ranks above traditional collective norms. Individual freedom has no limits, but produces an uninhibited drive to realize personal desires and aspirations resulting in giving top priority to personal need fulfilment (Ester et al., 1994: 8).

Proponents of what is called communitarian theory fear this development because 'there are social attachments which determine the self and thus individuals are constituted by the community of which they are part' (Avineri & De-Shalit, 1992: 3). Beliefs and values are determined by society and hence individuals cannot freely select their own convictions. If, as seems characteristic of modern society, the individual withdraws from community life, 'the modern self is therefore without a grounded, secure identity' (Crittenden, 1992: 19). The only way to solve the problem of individualistic, modern society is, according to proponents of the communitarian theories, the re-establishment of a firm moral order in society. The great diversity in modern, individualized society generates conflicts instead of a consensus on moral behaviours and convictions. Modern, individualized, liberal society 'lacks genuine moral consensus' (MacIntyre, 1981: 254) and seems characterized by a kind of 'ethical individualism, the doctrine that the final authority of ethical behaviour, values, and principles is the individual alone' (Crittenden, 1992: 78). In other words, morality has become personal, whereas in traditional (Western) society it was religious, collective.

The moral guidance of the churches has come under strong pressure, particularly in the realm of sexuality and morality. On issues like divorce, homosexuality, and abortion, people no longer rely solely on the judgments and prescriptions of the church. Increasingly, individuals are deciding for themselves. As Taylor puts it, 'masses of people can sense moral sources of a quite different kind, ones that don't necessarily suppose a God' (Taylor, 1989: 312-313). Dogmatic ethical (religious) rules are not taken for granted anymore, but dependent upon the situation and private interpretations and evaluations of these situations.

All in all, it seems reasonable to assume that traditional, institutional, civic morality will have decreased, and personal morality increased. Moral and sexual choices are thus increasingly based on personal decisions and lifestyle preferences. The traditional moral rules are assumed to have diminished in favour of a personal morality of 'anything goes.'

3. Two distinct moralities

The measurement of moral orientations in the European Values Study consisted of a long list of items covering a wide variety of moral issues and particular behaviours 'which an adult living in the twentieth century might have to confront in his or her life, or might at least be expected to have an opinion about' (Harding et al., 1986: 7). Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not the behaviours could always be justified, never be justified or something in between.¹ Twenty-four statements were presented, ranging from cheating on taxes and avoiding paying a fare, to political assassinations, homosexuality, and euthanasia. The results for the whole of Europe are given in figure 1.

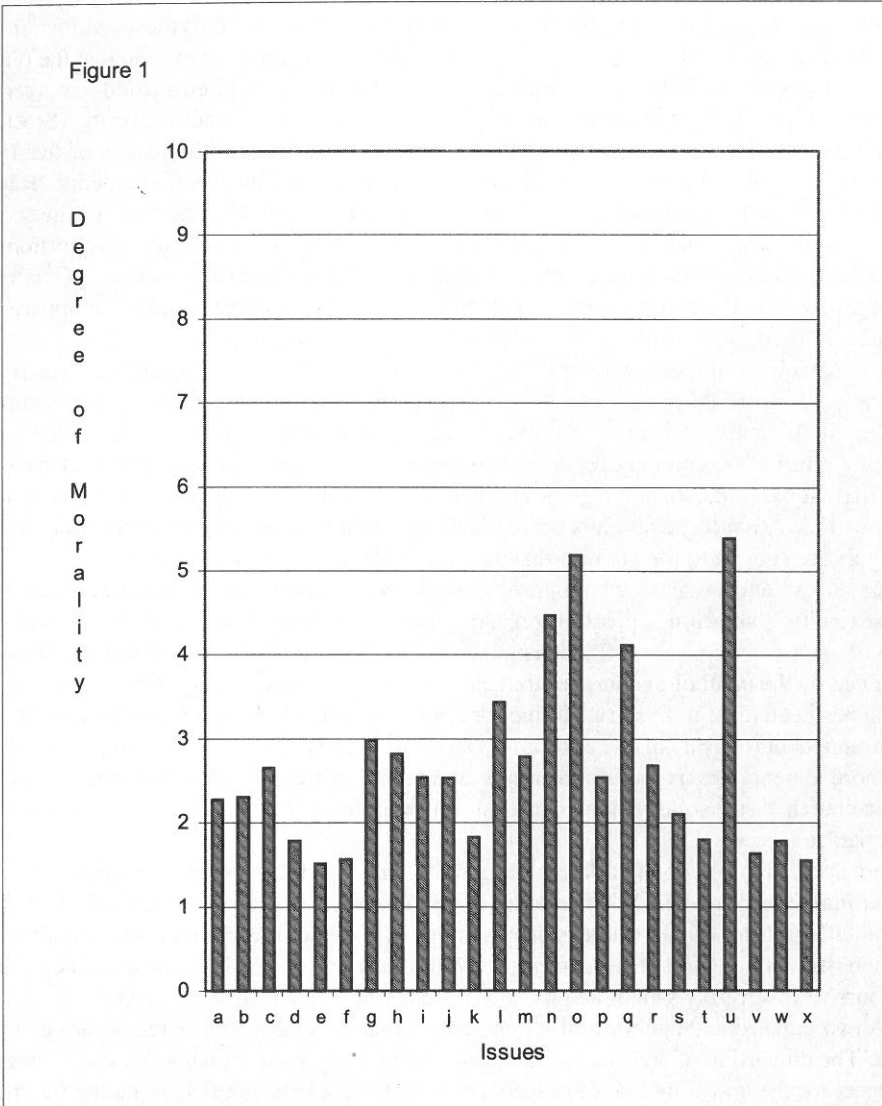
1. The question was: Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card. The answers on the card ranged from 1 = never to 10

Figure 1 Moral strictness and tolerance in Europe. Degree to which the moral behaviours and issues are considered justified, mean scores, total European sample

Interpretation of variables

- a. Claiming state benefits illegally
- b. Avoiding a fare on public transport
- c. Cheating on taxes
- d. Buying something you knew was stolen
- e. Joy-riding
- f. Taking drugs
- g. Keeping money that you have found
- h. Lying in your own interest
- i. Married men/women having an affair
- j. Sex under the legal age of consent
- k. Accepting a bribe
- l. Homosexuality
- m. Prostitution
- n. Abortion
- o. Divorce
- p. Fighting with the police
- q. Euthanasia
- r. Suicide
- s. Not reporting damage done to a parked car
- t. Threatening strike-breakers
- u. Killing in self-defence
- v. Political assassinations
- w. Littering in a public place
- x. Driving under the influence of alcohol

Behaviours which are considered to be most of all justifiable are 'killing in self-defence' and 'divorce,' whereas 'joy-riding,' 'driving under the influence of alcohol,' and 'using drugs' are considered least justifiable. An explanation for the severity with which driving someone else's car is judged is suggested by Stoetzel in his book on the 1981 survey data. Joy-riding is apparently an action for which it is extremely difficult to find a reasonable excuse or an extenuating circumstance, in other words it approaches a gratuitous act (Stoetzel, 1983: 34, Harding et al., 1986: 8).



However, there are some interesting intra-country differences that may reflect daily experiences in the countries. 'Joy-riding' is more an issue of concern in Western European countries and thus hardly acceptable, but in the Nordic countries 'sex with minors' appears far less acceptable, while in Eastern European countries 'drug abuse' is considered least justifiable. In the Baltic states, 'keeping money that you have found' is least justifiable. In the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Hungary, driving under the influence of alcohol is least accepted.

As far as most accepted behaviours are concerned, there are also some important intra-

country differences. 'Killing in self-defence' appears widely accepted in Europe, but in the Netherlands, 'homosexuality' is even more accepted, while in some countries divorce is more accepted than 'killing in self defence.'

It should be noted, however, that 'even for the most justifiable of all these actions, it can only be justified one out of every two times. It, therefore, is unwarranted to state that the public is subject to an excess of liberty. Moreover, for the whole of the [...] items listed, the average of the scores given is in the quartile of the scale which indicates the greatest severity' (Stoetzel, 1983: 30-31; translation by Meril James). This conclusion, based on the results of the 1981 EVS surveys, is valid in 1990 as well. Most countries display rather strict judgments. 'Rarely does a score exceed the halfway point of the scale (i.e., 5.5 out of 10), and most of the scores are considerably lower than this' (Harding et al., 1986: 7). In other words, high proportions of the populations considered most of the behaviours as 'never or hardly justified.' Generally speaking, people in the countries investigated by the European Values Study, are apparently not lenient in their judgements.

The behaviours and issues which can be justified least of all include 'joy-riding,' which was judged as never justifiable by no less than 85% (and often more) of the respondents, 'claiming state benefits illegally,' 'cheating on taxes,' 'buying something you knew was stolen,' and 'accepting a bribe.' A common feature of such behaviours seems to be the idea of living a decent life. Honesty, personal integrity, and being law-abiding are important qualities of such a virtuous life. All such behaviours are defined by the law as an offence or a crime. These behaviours are subject to the greatest disapproval in all countries investigated.

Behaviours and issues which are considered slightly more justifiable include 'homosexuality,' 'abortion,' 'prostitution,' 'divorce,' 'euthanasia,' and 'suicide.' A common feature of such behaviours and issues appears to be that all have been and still are strongly condemned by the (Catholic) churches, but allowed under certain legal systems. For example, abortion has been legal in Eastern Europe for a long time, and these countries are considered the forerunners in freely available abortion (Van de Kaa, 1987: 29). Eastern Europeans belong to the more lenient ones as far as abortion is concerned. In Ireland, where the position of the Catholic church is still solid,² and where abortion is not legal (except to save a woman's life), its acceptance is low.

There appears to be two major areas of morality: one which can be called *private morality*, the other *public* or *civic morality*. The latter dimension refers to the behaviours defined by the law as an offence or a crime, whereas private morality includes those behaviours which were, and often still are, regarded as sinful according to traditional Christian doctrine. These behaviours were severely sanctioned by society in the past (Harding et al., 1986: 11).

This two dimensional pattern is also apparent in a factor analysis.³ The results are given in Table 1. The dimension of *civic morality* refers to supporting virtues such as honesty, integrity and respect for the law. It includes the acceptance of deviant behaviours like 'taking free rides on public transport,' 'tax fraud,' 'claiming state benefits illegally,' 'buying something you knew was stolen,' 'joy-riding,' 'keeping money that you have found,' 'lying in your own interest,' 'accepting a bribe,' 'failing to report damage to a car,' 'threatening strike-breakers,' and 'political assassinations' (Halman & Vloet, 1994: 32).

22. At least at the times when the interviews were conducted for the European Values Studies (1981 and 1990).

3. Both dimensions appear correlated ($r = .40$ after oblimin rotation).

Table 1 Results factor analysis of morality items (loadings < -.30 or > .30; oblimin rotation)

	F1	F2
Claiming state benefits illegally	.55	
Avoiding a fare on public transport	.56	
Cheating on taxes	.48	
Buying something you knew was stolen	.70	
Joy-riding	.67	
Taking drugs	.46	
Keeping money that you have found	.34	
Lying in your own interest	.38	.32
Married men/women having an affair		.45
Sex under the legal age of consent		.44
Accepting a bribe	.62	
Homosexuality		.77
Prostitution		.71
Abortion	*	*
Divorce		.77
Fighting with the police	.45	
Euthanasia		.65
Suicide		.63
Not reporting damage done to a parked car	.63	
Threatening strike-breakers	.55	
Killing in self-defence		.49
Political assassinations	.51	
Littering in a public place	.60	
Driving under the influence of alcohol	.66	
% of variance	29	9

Correlation between factors: .40

- 'Abortion' was excluded from the analyses because it was not asked in Denmark. In the analyses in which this item was included, the pattern was more or less the same and 'abortion' loaded on the second dimension.

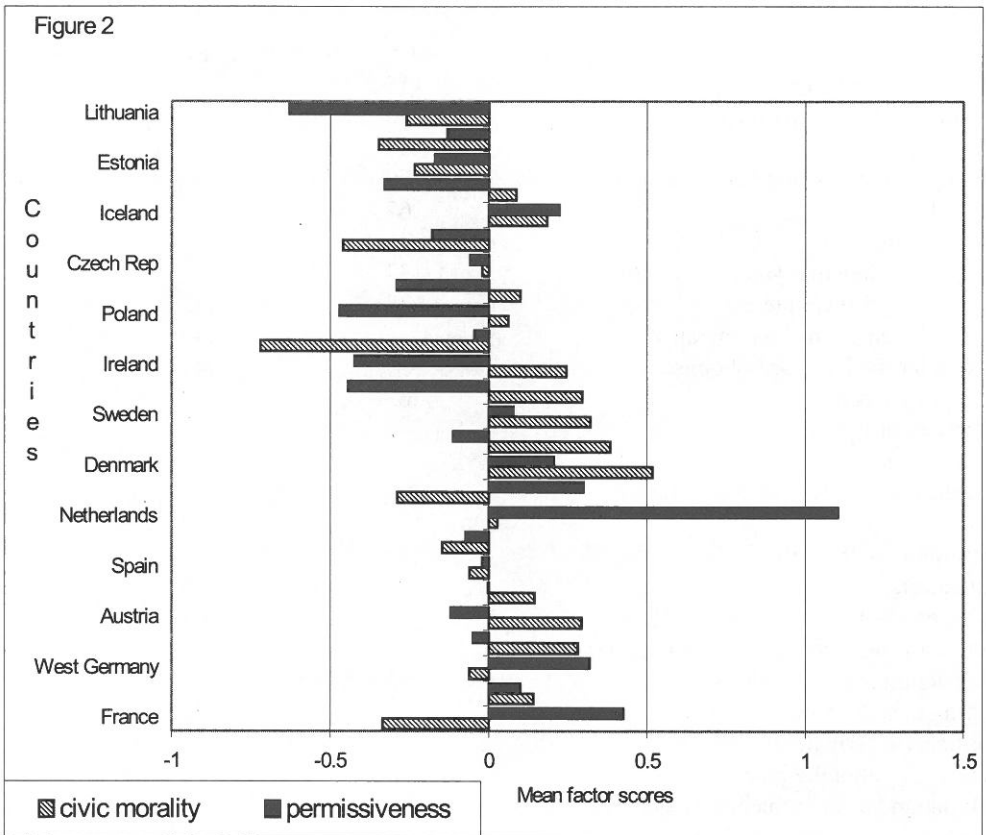
The other dimension can be called *permissiveness* and concerns the degrees of freedom with respect to the acceptance of multiple moral standards in society concerning sexual and (bio-) ethical behaviours. In the EVS surveys, it was indicated by the acceptance of 'adultery', 'sex under the legal age of consent', 'homosexuality', 'prostitution', 'euthanasia', 'divorce', 'suicide,' and 'killing in self-defence.'

Based on this factor analysis, scores have been calculated on both dimensions for each individual.

4. Cross-national varieties in moral beliefs

Each country's mean scores on both dimensions are displayed in Figure 2. Dutch people appear to be extraordinarily permissive as far as private morality is concerned, but they are more moderate in issues of civic morality. In contrast, Hungarians are rather lenient in terms of civic morality but less tolerant with respect to moral permissiveness.

Figure 2 Civic morality and permissiveness in Europe, mean factor scores



Further inspection of Figure 2 reveals that the distinctive permissive orientation among the Dutch is mainly caused by the large number of people who believe that 'homosexuality,' 'prostitution,' 'sex with minors,' 'euthanasia,' and 'suicide,' are behaviours which can be morally justified. It is important to note here that the interpretation of moral permissiveness easily causes confusion. Permissiveness does *not* mean a lack of public or private morality, nor does it mean that people do not have clear moral standards. First and foremost, the term permissiveness indicates the acceptance of a plurality of moral standards in a modern individualized society (Halman & De Moor, 1994b: 56). In this sense, permissiveness indicates general tolerance of contrasting moral codes but does not necessarily reflect a willingness to be exposed to behavioural expressions of these multiple moral standards. The spirit of permissiveness is nicely illustrated by Bellah and associates: 'If you want to go in your house and smoke marijuana and shoot dope and get all screwed up, that's your business, but don't bring that out on the street, don't expose my children to it, just do your thing' (Bellah et al., 1986: 7).

The unique position of Hungary is due primarily to the greater tolerance among Hungarians of behaviours such as 'not paying a fare on public transport,' 'buying something you know was stolen,' 'joy-riding,' and 'accepting bribes.'

Although the picture revealed in Figure 2 is rather complicated, several more or less distinct groupings of countries can be discovered based on their scores in this two-dimensional space

of opposite quadrants. For instance, France, Belgium, and the former Federal Republic of Germany, are located in the upper left quadrant. Their counterparts in the bottom right quadrant are the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland (showing very similar moral stands), Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania.

Comparing the nations' locations on both moral dimensions, heuristic evidence can be obtained of countries which seem to be more or less permissive and more or less supportive of civic virtues. In some cases, the picture is intuitively appealing, in other cases, however, it is less clear. The predominantly Catholic population of the Irish Republic and the largely Protestant population of Northern Ireland share very similar opinions as far as permissiveness and civic morality are concerned. The same applies to Bulgaria and Romania, with their orthodox religious traditions. Despite their distinctive religious background, both Eastern European countries are located in the same quadrant as Ireland.

Such examples seem to illustrate that one should go beyond *ad hoc* explanations of similarities and dissimilarities in patterns of moral orientations across countries. It seems as if the findings as reported in Figure 2 cannot be understood by direct references to political regimes or geographical and historical or religious factors. We need a more comprehensive theoretical and empirical framework in order to grasp *why* the constellation of nations has emerged. The finding that Hungarians are more accepting than the Dutch in condoning the abuse of drugs seems to indicate not only that Dutch society is not the most tolerant, but also that the feeling that Dutch society is too tolerant of drugs is a myth. More detailed findings show that comparable levels of permissiveness and adherence to civic morality may still entail important cross-national differences in specific attitudes. 'Sex under the legal age of consent' is an issue that is found hardly justified by people in Scandinavian countries. Ninety-eight percent or more, of people in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden share the opinion that 'sex under the legal age of consent' can never be justified. The Scandinavian population is even more reluctant to accept this behaviour than the least permissive and most traditional countries such as Ireland and Northern Ireland. In the Netherlands about 18% of the population shares this opinion about sex under 18. The Danes appear most in favour of civic virtues. Apart from the large number of respondents who never, under any circumstance, will accept joy-riding (96%), large majorities of Danes reject accepting a bribe (91%), fighting with the police (83%), failing to report damage done accidentally to a parked car (84%), threatening workers who refuse to join a strike (80%), and political assassinations (93%). Comparably high proportions of people who regard these behaviours as never justifiable, are not observed in other countries, although people in other Scandinavian countries are more strict in their moral values, compared to other populations. The Dutch appear to be extremely tolerant of homosexuality and they are most tolerant of prostitution, euthanasia, and suicide. People in Poland, Bulgaria, and Rumania are less lenient towards such behaviours. The Dutch tolerance of euthanasia may be explained by the fact that it is a much debated ethical issue in this country. Recently legislation in this area was passed in the Netherlands. It is now one of the few countries, if not the only one, where euthanasia is openly discussed and no longer practised behind closed doors.

Such results suggest that as far as sexual and (bio-)ethical issues are concerned, the Dutch are, compared with other people, most strongly in favour of the post-modern notion of 'anything goes.' However, once again it must be stressed that this does not imply that the Dutch have no, or low, moral standards. In Dutch society more than in other countries, people can imagine and accept that others will behave in a deviant way. In Scandinavia, the relatively high civic morality seems to indicate a middle class decency. Furthermore, it becomes clear, that a uniform pattern of morality does not exist in Eastern European countries. Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria appear to be rather strict in their judgements, whereas especially Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Slovakia are more permissive.

5. Religion and morality

As was argued and observed earlier, churches in modern society are in a less prominent position. They no longer dictate people's behaviours and beliefs. As a consequence, we have argued that the more secular a society is, the less strict its population will be. In this section, we empirically explore this assumption. We also explore the idea that the impact of religion on morality is weaker the more secular a society is. Since we do not have a direct way to establish the impact of religion,⁴ we examine the relationships between people's religious involvement and their moral views.

In order to empirically test these assumptions, we first established a country's level of secularization. The degree of secularization is derived from the levels of church attendance and the importance of God in one's life. Church attendance can be regarded as an indicator of institutional religiosity, while the importance of God reveals one's personal belief. Both enable us to investigate the differential impact. For example, it can be assumed that since institutional religiosity is on the wane, church attendance is only slightly correlated with moral convictions, while people's personal beliefs are still essential to their moral convictions.

In Table 2 we have ranked the countries according to the levels of church attendance and the importance of God. To determine a country's level of religiousness, we have regressed both church attendance and importance of God, respectively, on age, gender, level of education, together with a set of 23-1 country dummy variables⁵ with Northern Ireland as the reference category. The obtained unstandardized regression coefficients for the country dummy variables can be used as measures of the national impact on the level of church attendance and importance of God, respectively. The lower the regression coefficient, the lesser the impact and thus the more secular a country is (cf. Dobbelaere & Jagodzinski, 1995b: 210-212).

4. For example, a question like: 'My Christian faith has a great influence on my daily life' or 'My Christian faith plays an important role when I have to make major decisions' (Felling, Peters & Schreuder, 1991). Such direct questions about the influence of one's religious faith are not available in the data from the European Values Studies.

5. The two indicators, church attendance and importance of God, were not available in Estonia and Lithuania. Consequently, instead of 25-1 dummy variables we are able to include only 23-1 dummies.

Table 2. Personal religiosity, church attendance, and the impact of national context

	Importance of God				church attendance				Rank	
	B	Rank	mean	rank	B	rank	mean	rank	mean	rank
Czech Rep.	-4.25	1	3.54	1	-2.83	3	2.59	3	2.00	1
Bulgaria	-4.12	3	3.56	2	-2.84	2	2.58	2	2.25	2
Sweden	-3.64	5	3.75	4	-2.87	1	2.40	1	2.75	3
E. Germany	-4.19	2	3.65	3	-2.62	5.5	2.82	6	4.25	4.5
Denmark	-3.66	4	3.92	5	-2.72	4	2.65	4	4.25	4.5
France	-3.23	6	4.43	6	-2.62	5.5	2.75	5	5.50	6
Norway	-3.05	7	4.55	8	-2.48	7	2.91	7	7.25	7
Great Britain	-2.60	10	5.25	11	-2.42	8	3.05	8	9.25	8
Latvia	-2.99	8	4.46	7	-1.60	13	3.74	13	10.25	9
Netherlands	-2.75	9	4.90	9	-1.88	12	3.51	12	10.50	10
Belgium	-2.49	12	5.22	10	-1.99	11	3.42	11	11	11.5
Hungary	-2.51	11	5.41	13	-2.09	10	3.41	10	11	11.5
Iceland	-1.28	17	6.11	15	-2.21	9	3.06	9	12.50	13
W. Germany	-2.49	13	5.36	12	-1.52	14	3.94	14	13.25	14
Slovakia	-1.81	14	5.97	14	-1.12	17	4.28	17	15.50	15
Spain	-1.56	15	6.25	16	-1.17	16	4.24	16	15.75	16
Portugal	-.99	18	6.72	18	-1.23	15	4.10	15	16.50	17
Austria	-1.54	16	6.26	17	-1.06	18	4.38	18	17.25	18
Romania	-.236	20	7.45	20	-.74	19	4.66	19	19.50	19.5
Italy	-.654	19	7.15	19	-.27	20	5.15	20	19.50	19.5
N. Ireland	0	21	7.82	21	0	20	5.45	21	21	21
Ireland	.158	22	7.93	22	1.27	23	6.69	23	22.50	22.5
Poland	.68	23	8.43	23	.88	22	6.31	22	22.50	22.5

Thus, four rankings of 23 countries have been developed: two rankings from the national means of church attendance and the importance of God, respectively, and two from the regression analyses of the country dummies. It is obvious that the four measures rank the countries in a very similar way. The Spearman rank correlation coefficients range between .92 and .99. The orders of church attendance and the country's regression coefficients for church attendance are almost identical ($r_s = .99$; $p < .001$). A similar result is obtained for the rankings of importance of God and the country's regression coefficient for the importance of God, respectively ($r_s = .97$; $p < .001$). The correlation between the national means for church attendance and importance of God is somewhat lower but still highly significant ($r_s = .92$; $p < .001$). The ranking of the two measures of the national impact on church attendance and the importance of God, respectively, are also significantly similar ($r_s = .92$; $p < .001$). Since the four different rankings of the countries with regard to the levels of religious involvement yield such similar results, we calculated a mean ranking for the 23 countries. The mean orders are presented in the last column of Table 2.

In order to find regional patterns with regard to the national levels of religious involvement, we performed a cluster analysis on the four measures of the levels of religious involvement. The results are presented in Table 3. The Czech Republic appears most secular along with Bulgaria, Sweden, East Germany, Denmark, France, and Norway. A second cluster of countries consists of somewhat less secular societies: Great Britain, Latvia, the Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary, Iceland, and West Germany. A third cluster contains Spain, the Slovak Republic, Portugal, Austria, while Romania, Italy, and Northern Ireland appear in a fourth cluster. Finally, the countries with the highest degrees of religious involvement are Ireland and Poland. Table 3 presents the mean scores on church attendance and the importance of God for these five groups of countries.

Table 3 Mean scores for four clusters of countries on church attendance and importance of God and degree of secularization based on church attendance and importance of God

	church attendance	importance of God	secularization (church)	secularization (imp God)
1. most secular (Cz, Bu, Sw, EG, De, No, Fr)	2.67	3.91	-2.71	-3.73
2. (GB, La, NI, Be, Hu, Ic, WG)	3.51	5.09	-1.92	-2.47
3. (Sp, Sl, Por, Au)	4.01	6.26	-1.36	-1.44
4. (Ro, It, NI)	5.09	7.47	-.34	-.30
5. Most religious (Ir, Pl)	6.50	8.18	1.06	.43

The cluster analysis yielded some interesting results. For instance, although the Czech and Slovak Republics were still united at the time of the 1990 EVS data collection, they are very different with regard to the levels of religious involvement. According to the analysis, the Czech Republic is the most secular country, while the Slovak Republic is one of the more religious parts of Europe. Furthermore, Italy appears more religious than Spain and Portugal, two countries that are *less* modernized compared to Italy when economic parameters are used. Portugal in particular is less developed economically. Thus, this country is expected to display lower levels of secularization than Spain and Italy. However, the opposite appears to be the case.

The cluster analysis did not demonstrate a clear East-West pattern in Europe. Poland is among the most religious countries in Europe, while the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Eastern Germany show the same high levels of secularization as obtained for Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Romania resembles the Italian religious pattern, while Hungary and Latvia are close to Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Thus, the countries from Eastern Europe have not been shown to be homogenous and different with regard to the levels of religious involvement.

As can be seen in Table 3, a certain division between Catholic and Protestant countries seems to exist, with indeed lower levels of religious involvement in Protestant Nordic countries, and higher levels in Southern and/or Catholic countries. Though Iceland is mainly Protestant, in terms of religious involvement, it has higher levels than the other Nordic countries. France is in a cluster with the most secular countries. Nevertheless, about 60% of its population is Catholic. A similar remark can be made with respect to Belgium. This is clearly a Catholic country, but it belongs to the cluster of more secularized countries. So, although a Catholic-Protestant divide can be discerned by cluster analysis, there are obvious exceptions to the general assumption that the religious involvement is lower in Protestant countries than in Catholic countries. In this regard, it should also be mentioned that a cluster analysis of Western European countries only does not reveal the expected Catholic-Protestant divide. In a similar sense, it should be noticed that also the orthodox countries are not homogenous in terms of church attendance or the importance of people's beliefs in God. Bulgarian orthodox culture appears comparatively secularized, while Romanian orthodox culture appears to score comparatively high on religious involvement.

Cluster analysis does not yield a clear-cut and easily interpretable regionalisation with regard to the degree of religious involvement among 23 European countries. The patterns which do emerge, only partly correlate to differences in the main Christian traditions. Therefore, besides differences in theological traditions, national levels of religious involvement must depend on other factors as well.

What about the idea that the more secular a country is the more permissive and less strict its population? This assumption is not corroborated by the results. In Table 4, we have displayed the mean scores for the five regions differing in degree of secularisation. The most permissive region is not the most secular, while the most secular countries in Europe do not display the lowest level of civic morality as could have been expected. Civic morality is even highest in those countries that rank highest on secularization.

Table 4 Mean scores on both morality dimensions in the five regions

	Civic morality	Permissiveness
1 Most secular Cz, Bu, Sw, EG, De, No, Fr	.1778	.0245
2 GB, La, NI, Be, Hu, Ic, WG	-.1520	.2662
3 SP, SI, Por, Au	-.0934	-.0942
4 Ro, It, NI	.1751	-.2588
5 Most religious Ir, Pl	.1531	-.4471

The question is whether such a clustering of countries is justified, since the results of a cluster analysis of the scores on both moral dimensions reveals a pattern that does not resemble one based on degree of secularization. Least strict are France, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Belgium, Slovakia, and Hungary. Most strict are Austria, Northern Ireland, East Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Norway, and Denmark. In the case of private morality, the Netherlands is most permissive, followed by West Germany, Belgium, and France. Least permissive are Bulgaria, Romania, Northern Ireland, Ireland, Poland, and Lithuania. The rankings according to level of permissiveness and civic strictness do not resemble the rankings of countries according to levels of secularization. We expected that people in the Czech Republic would be most permissive and most lenient towards various public behaviours, but this is not the case. People in this country appear rather reluctant to accept such behaviours. Those countries that are more secular also do not reveal permissive morality patterns. Nordic countries, although highly secular, appear most strict. Permissiveness is highest in the Netherlands, but this country is not the most secular in terms of church attendance and importance of God.

Our next hypothesis assumed that the more secular a society is, the less the impact of religious beliefs and church attendance on morality. This hypothesis was empirically tested by means of regression analyses. In Table 5, relevant unstandardized regression coefficients are displayed. The higher the regression coefficients, the stronger the relationship between people's religious beliefs and both types of moral beliefs. It is clear that the results of our analyses do not corroborate the assumption. More secular societies do not yield a pattern in which religious involvement has a weaker impact on public or private morality. What is revealed, however, is that moral outlooks on sexual and (bio-)ethical issues are more closely associated with their religious involvement than their outlook on civic virtues. This pattern occurs in most countries. The strongest impact of religious involvement on civic morality is found in both Irish countries. However, it is less strong in Poland, a country that is the most religious of all the countries. The impact of religious involvement is weakest in Slovakia and the Nordic countries: Denmark and Norway but not in the Czech Republic, which contradicts all expectations.

Table 5 Regression coefficients 'importance of God' and 'church attendance' on Civic morality and permissiveness (unstandardized coefficients)

	Civic morality		Permissiveness	
	Importance of God	Church attendance	Importance of God	Church attendance
France	.035*	-.006	-.043**	.093***
Great Britain	.020*	-.027*	-.071***	.028*
West Germany	.075***	-.001	-.076***	.099***
East Germany	.002	.020	-.047***	.048**
Austria	.024**	-.003	-.077***	.070***
Italy	.008	-.041**	-.103***	.129***
Spain	.041***	.002	-.082***	.091***
Portugal	.026**	-.000	-.039***	.092***
Netherlands	.033**	-.002	-.124***	.068***
Belgium	.034***	-.045***	-.059***	.107***
Denmark	.009	-.029**	-.068***	.066***
Norway	.007	-.016	-.060***	.071***
Sweden	.014	-.025	-.045***	.061**
N. Ireland	.083***	.016	-.071***	.025
Ireland	.083***	-.029	-.095***	.101***
Hungary	.011	-.006	-.009	.041
Poland	.002	.011	-.056***	.028
Bulgaria	.013	.023	-.031**	-.029
Czech Rep.	.011	.005	-.031***	.029*
Slovakia	-.005	-.015	-.052***	.065***
Iceland	.043***	-.009	-.071***	.055**
Romania	.045***	-.009	-.071***	.046**
Latvia	-.000	.074	-.047*	-.050

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Furthermore, the impact of religious involvement on private morality is not strongest in the most religious countries, Poland and Ireland, but in Southern Europe, Italy and Spain, and in the Netherlands! The latter is strange, since the Netherlands is far from a religious country. However, the result seems to suggest that permissiveness is widespread not only among secular people but also among religious people. The idea that the association between religious involvement and permissiveness is weaker in more secular societies is refuted.

In order to find a pattern in the regression coefficients, a cluster analysis was performed. Again, the results are difficult to interpret and understand. A North-South or East-West distinction does not appear in Europe. It is a grouping of countries that seems to make no sense at all. For example, the impact of the item 'importance of God' is more or less of the same magnitude in countries like the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Iceland, Romania, and Spain. Does this grouping make sense? Hardly, for Romania is much more religious than France, the Netherlands or Belgium. Similar unexpected groupings of countries emerge as far as the impact of church attendance and permissiveness are concerned. Patterns distinguishing countries according to the impact of religious involvement on moral convictions are apparently not linked to levels of secularization. The rankings appear too different to justify the conclusion that those countries that score high on secularization in terms of church involvement, display the lowest levels of impact of religious involvement on both moralities and vice versa. The rankings show only modest similarities which do not appear statistically significant.

6. Catholic versus Protestant

With respect to the impact of religion it is most often assumed that a cleavage exist between Catholic and Protestant contexts: a cleavage that parallels a European north-south divide. The religious decline is notably more evident in Northern parts of Europe and the difference between North and South is often attributed to differences between Catholicism and Protestantism (see also Davie, 1992: 224). Due to greater incentives for religious individualism among Protestants, this culture is assumed to be more affected by the process of secularization than Catholic culture, both in terms of a lower level of religiosity and a weaker impact of religion on other social domains. These differences have at least partly been attributed to *theological* differences between Catholicism and Protestantism (Jagodzinski & Dobbelaere, 1995a: 81).

The impact of religion is generally assumed to be stronger in Catholic countries than in Protestant countries, but is this assumptions valid? At the individual level we can indeed find marked differences between Catholics and Protestants as far as moral beliefs are concerned. Catholics appear less permissive than Protestants in private issues, but Protestants score higher in civic morality. It was noted earlier that Norway, Sweden, and Denmark have remarkably high scores on civic morality. Since the Protestants in our survey data are recruited from these three Nordic countries it will not be a surprise to find them to be rather strict as far as decent behaviour is concerned. However, in sexual and (bio-)ethical issues, they appear more lenient. Unchurched people are most permissive and least inclined to adhere to civic virtues, while the orthodox people of Romania and Bulgaria are the most severe in their moral convictions. The results are given in Table 6.

Table 6 Mean scores on both morality dimensions for Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox, other religious groups, and unchurched in Europe

	Civic morality	Permissiveness
Catholics	.0319	-.1796
Protestants	.2982	.0246
Orthodox	.1184	-.3714
Other	.0286	-.1967
Unchurched	-.2456	.3226

However, such overall figures mask intra-country differences. They become evident, however, in a comparison of mean scores on both moral dimensions calculated for Catholics and Protestants. In Figure 3, the mean scores on both dimensions of Catholics and Protestants in various countries are presented.

Figure 3 Civic morality and permissiveness of Catholics and Protestants in Western Europe (mean factor scores)

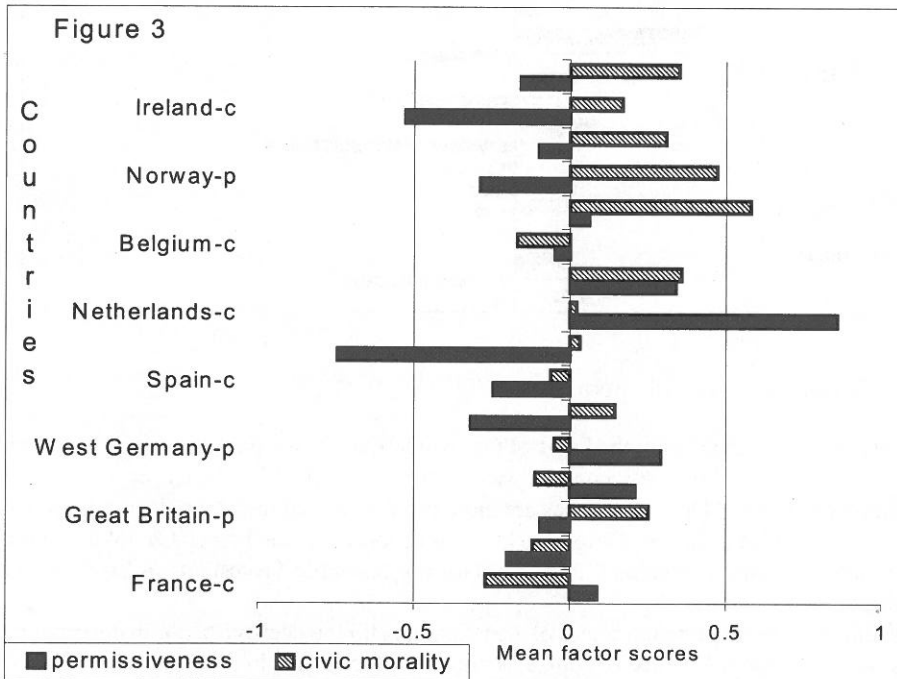
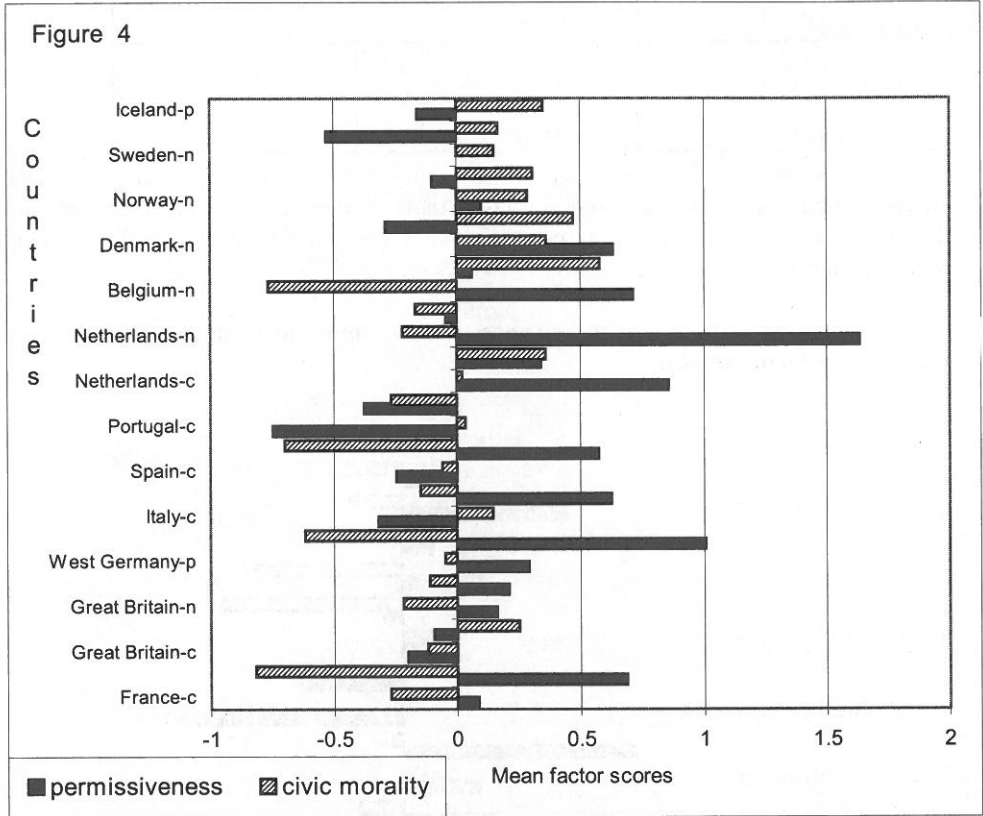


Figure 3 demonstrates that indeed in most countries, Catholics are less permissive and morally more strict than Protestants. Dutch Catholics are, however, an important exception to this general rule. They are much more permissive and less strict than their Protestant compatriots. In Germany, Catholic and Protestant is not an important distinction in this respect.

This result corroborates the conclusions of previous investigations among Catholics and Protestants in Germany (Lukatis & Lukatis, 1982).

This apparently straightforward interpretation becomes, however, less easy to understand if the increasingly important category of unchurched people is included in the analysis. In Figure 4, the results are presented.

Figure 4 Civic morality and permissiveness of Catholics, Protestants and unchurched people in Western Europe (mean factor scores)



In most countries⁵ the unchurched part of the population is more permissive and less strict than their churched fellow citizens. However, there remain significant cross-national differences. For instance, Dutch Catholics are more permissive and less strict than unchurched people in Scandinavian countries. British unchurched people resemble French Catholics in both moral orientations, and unchurched people in Norway resemble Protestants in Sweden and Great Britain.

Therefore, the specific circumstances of a country are still the decisive factor in determining people's moral convictions. This, of course, is not new. Marx stated in one of his most famous publications, that 'it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness' (Marx quoted by Aron, 1977: 120). Since 'national boundaries still determine a key unit of socio-economic experience' (Inglehart, 1977: 126), such differences were to be expected. It seems as if value diversity and

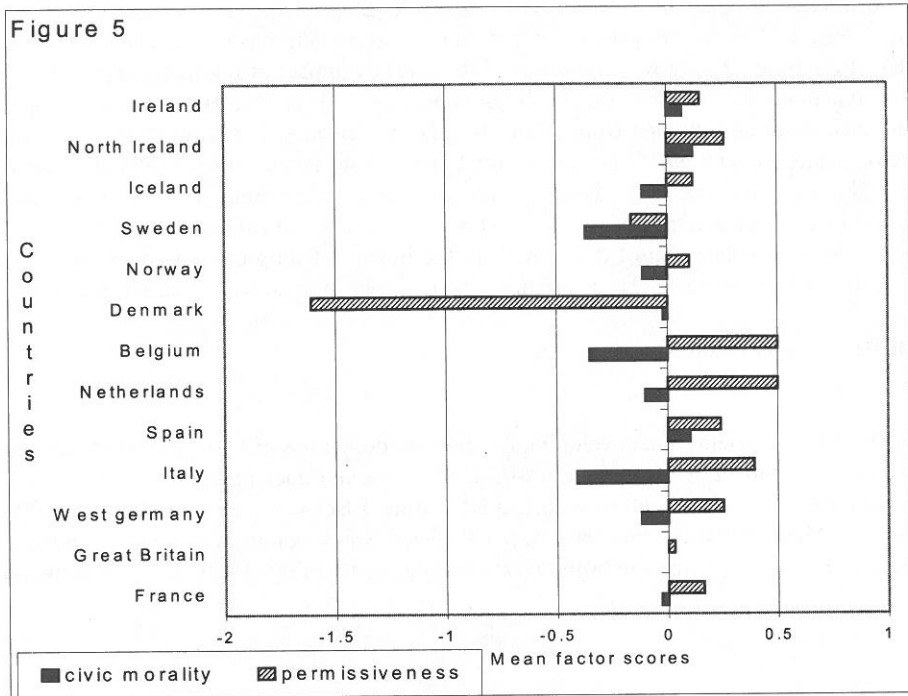
cross national differences in attitudinal preferences may be attributed to specific circumstances in a country.

As mentioned earlier, rankings of countries according to the degree to which religious involvement has an impact on moral convictions is not easily interpretable or understandable. In view of this, a Catholic-Protestant divide does not make much sense. Again we can refer to a cluster of countries that show similarities in the level of impact of the item 'importance of God' on civic morality. The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Iceland, Romania, and Spain appear close to each other and distinct from other clusters of countries. However, this cluster is a mixture of Catholic countries, (France, Belgium, Spain), Protestant countries (Iceland), a mixed country (Netherlands), and an orthodox religious country (Romania). It is obvious that a Catholic-Protestant cleavage does not exist. However, such results also demonstrate that the interpretation and explanation of differences in the impact of religious involvement can be found in other nation-specific characteristics. The only question is, what characteristics?

7. Shifts in moral beliefs

Whether or not societies are developing in a post-modern ethos of 'anything goes' can only be answered for countries in the Western world, where similar questions were asked in 1981. Eastern European countries cannot be compared in time. Elsewhere (Halman & Vloet, 1994; Halman & de Moor, 1994b), scores have been calculated which enable us to compare countries over time and investigate shifts in both private and public morality. The results are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Shifts in civic morality and permissiveness in Western Europe (mean factor scores in 1990 minus mean factor scores in 1981)



In general, the conclusion is that permissiveness towards sexual and (bio-)ethical behaviours increased whereas civic morality decreased, but there are some important exceptions to this general rule. The conclusion that the acceptance of various sexual behaviours and (bio-)ethical issues increased, is valid for a majority of countries, Denmark and Sweden being important exceptions. In Denmark and, to a lesser extent, in Sweden, permissiveness decreased. The decline is undeniable and rather unexpected and has been related to the combination of two factors: the (relatively) high level of permissiveness in these countries in the early eighties, and the fear of AIDS. However, it seems unlikely that it can be attributed to what is called 'ceiling effects' (something cannot go any higher because the top has already been reached), because the ceiling has not yet been reached in these countries. Although these countries were indeed most lenient in 1981, the degree of their level of permissiveness should not be exaggerated. On the ten-point scales most of the scores did not go over 5. The fear of AIDS may have been a more significant factor. Levels of permissiveness decreased primarily among young people, who were most permissive towards homosexuality, adultery, and prostitution in 1981, and who nowadays are most frightened of AIDS (Pettersson, 1994a; 1994b; Halman & Pettersson, 1995).

In most countries, civic or public morality decreased slightly, but there are exceptions. The important exceptions are Spain and Ireland where civic morality increased somewhat. Significant decreases can be noted in Belgium, Sweden, and Italy. Despite a small decrease in civic morality, Danes have remained the strictest of all people. As in 1981, the French appear to be the least strict. France and Belgium are the most lenient countries.

The question whether countries in Western Europe are becoming more homogeneous in their moral opinions has been investigated by comparing the deviations from the mean, cross-nationally and within countries. Variations between countries decreased as far as civic morality is concerned, while the cross-national differences in permissiveness increased. This, however, is mainly due to the extraordinary position of the Netherlands in 1990. Dutch people have become highly permissive, an increase which is not found in other countries.

The variations within countries do not follow a 'universal' pattern. In some countries, people have become more diverse in their judgements, in others they have become more similar. Furthermore, if people have become more similar in their views about sexual behaviours and (bio-)ethical issues, this is not necessarily accompanied by a decrease in diversity of views on civic morality, and vice versa.

The conclusion is that, as far as civic morality is concerned, people in Western countries have become more similar, whereas they have become more dissimilar in their views on sexual and (bio-)ethical issues.

9. Conclusions

This paper addressed the popular belief that morality in modern society is on the decline. In particular the ongoing processes of individualization and secularization are considered two of the primary reasons for this decreasing morality. Individualization entails increasing levels of personal autonomy, self-reliance, and an emphasis on individual development. This is considered incompatible with a firm moral order which is collective, often traditional, and dominated by religion. Proponents of a communitarian theory have expressed their concerns for the negative consequences of modern, self-centred life. People in modern society are accused of being selfish, egotistical, consumeristic, narcissistic, and hedonistic, and such qualities undermine solidarity in society. What is needed is the re-establishment of a firm moral social order. But are these negative impressions valid?

The data from the European Values Study were used to examine the notion of moral decline. If such a decline indeed has occurred, the expectation is that some countries will be less strict. The developments do not take place at the same speed and will have started at different points. In Europe, secularization and individualization are more advanced in the Northern parts, whereas Southern Europe and Ireland are still highly traditional, less secular, and less individualized. Clear expectations with regard to Eastern Europe were hard to formulate beforehand since this part of Europe is still so unknown. Therefore, our analyses were mainly exploratory.

Two moral dimensions were distinguished. One was called *civic morality*. The important features of this morality are an emphasis on living a virtuous, decent life. The data from the European Values Study reveal that such behaviours are not tolerated in Western and Eastern Europe, but there are some significant differences between the various populations. Hungarians, for instance, appear to be less intolerant of such behaviours, whereas Danes, for example, are highly intolerant of such matters.

Another moral dimension was tentatively labelled *permissiveness* and refers to the attitude towards sexual and (bio-)ethical issues. Now that the role of the churches has diminished significantly in most Northwestern European countries, it was expected that high levels of permissiveness would be found. This expectation was generally confirmed, but it should be stressed that Denmark, which was the most permissive country in 1981, has experienced a decline in permissiveness since then, as did other Scandinavian countries. This decline is regarded as a consequence of the fear of AIDS. As such, Denmark, and Sweden as well, may exemplify what will happen in other countries. Dutch society has become the most tolerant towards all kinds of deviant sexual behaviours and ethical

issues. It is likely that, in the near future, the Dutch will follow the Danish and Swedish pattern of decreasing levels of permissiveness.

Another issue dealt with in this chapter is the assumed decline in adherence to civic virtues and the increase in permissiveness in Western countries. This impression is generally supported. Civic morality has declined in a large majority of the countries, whereas permissiveness has increased throughout the Western world. However, it must be emphasised that the majority of Western and Eastern European people are still rather reluctant to accept the various behaviours presented to them in the questionnaire. Nevertheless, there is still great variation in the degree of permissiveness and adherence to civic virtues, as well as in the shifts occurring in both orientations.

It does not seem as though morality has declined, but that the basis of morality has changed. Instead of a morality dominated and legitimized by the churches, a kind of private morality is emerging. This confirms ideas on modernization in general and individualization in particular, which state that people in modern societies are becoming less reliant on institutions, and more individual, i.e., personally responsible for their behaviours. The conclusion seems to be that there has not been a moral decline, but a moral change. The institutional, religion-dominated morality has been marginalised. People are not becoming a-moral, but instead their morality is based more on personal considerations and convictions than in the past. In other words, they are developing a personal morality.

It will be clear from the above empirical figures that the countries investigated here vary in moral matters. There are significant cross-national dissimilarities, and it seems as if such cross-national differences are increasing, particularly in the case of sexual and (bio-)ethical issues. However, the popular view that modern societies are suffering a moral decline in the sense that modern people are lacking clear moral standards, cannot be confirmed. The attitude that 'anything goes' in (post-) modern society appears to be a myth.