The Impact of Modernisation and Culture on Morality 
and Moral Change in Europe 
: From Universalism to Contextualism 

Hermann Dülmer

1. Introduction

From time to time moral questions become the focus of heated public debates. From the second half of the 1960s until the end of the 1970s, for instance, in many Western European countries big disputes arose concerning the question of whether abortion can be morally justified and, if so, under what conditions. As a result, in several countries strict abortion rules (abortion was, if at all, only allowed for instance, when the pregnancy was the result of a rape) were replaced step by step by more liberal laws, which sometimes also included social reasons for having an abortion. Under specific conditions, abortion was legalised for the first time in Great Britain in 1967, in Austria in 1974, in France in 1975, and in Italy in 1978 (The Law Library of Congress 2015). In West Germany abortion remained unlawful but became permitted under specific circumstances in 1976 (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2015). Although in the 1970s abortion was not prosecuted any longer in the Netherlands, a liberalisation of the existing law did not take place until 1981 (cf. also The Law Library of Congress 2015)\(^1\). In today’s Europe the most restrictive abortion laws exist in Ireland, Malta, and Poland: in Ireland abortion is only allowed when the life of the mother is at risk, in Poland it is allowed in the case of rape, a eugenic or medical indication, and in Malta it is allowed under no circumstances (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2015). Another topic disputed publicly in the last decades of many West European countries is the issue of homosexual marriage. In 2000, the Netherlands was the first country in Europe to legalise same-sex marriage. Belgium was next (2003), followed by Spain (2005), Norway (2008), Sweden (2009), Iceland (2010), Portugal (2010), Denmark (2012), England/Wales (2013), France (2013), Luxembourg (2014), Scotland (2014), Finland (2015), Ireland (2015),

\(^1\)In today’s Europe the most restrictive abortion laws exist in Ireland, Malta, and Poland: in Ireland abortion is only allowed when the life of the mother is at risk, in Poland it is allowed in the case of rape, a eugenic or medical indication, and in Malta it is allowed under no circumstances (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2015).
Moral debates, however, are not restricted to questions of sexuality and family. Although, for example, tax evasion has not itself been a moral issue in Germany, in the early 2010s there was nevertheless a heated dispute about whether German state governments are entitled to buy stolen CD-ROMs containing information about (relatively rich) German citizens who were using Swiss bank accounts to evade tax (Borrud/Knight 2010). With this information, financial investigators were able to prosecute tax evaders successfully, which contributed to greater tax fairness overall, and this was seen by many Germans to be justification enough for federal states to purchase stolen CD-ROMs. These few examples may illustrate that moral issues can deeply divide the wider public. This sometimes makes it difficult or even impossible to find a consensus which is commonly shared. By focussing on moral controversies the question may arise of whether common universal, absolutely valid moral guidelines (moral universalism/absolutism) exist any longer or whether morality is becoming increasingly more relativistic (moral relativism). The latter position might be the result of misinterpreting increased tolerance in post-industrial societies: compared to more traditional societies, in modernising societies more and more people may apply existing universal moral guidelines more flexibly and context sensitively (moral contextualism/restricted moral universalism) by taking potential negative consequences into account.

The aim of this article is to improve our understanding of differences and similarities in the moral judgment behaviour of people within as well as between different European societies. In the following, hypotheses about modernisation and its influence on moral judgement behaviour will be derived from theories of cultural and moral change (Inglehart 1997, Inglehart/Welzel 2005, Nunner-Winkler 1996a, 2009, cf. also Dülmer 2009, 2014). In the empirical part, the hypotheses will be tested by using several questions about the moral justifiability of different behaviours that have been asked in the most recent wave of the European Values Study 2008. An advantage of using the European Values Study is that the data set covers nearly all European societies. The most important results will be summarised and briefly discussed in the final chapter.
2. Modernisation, Culture, and Moral Change

Moral rules like those to be found in the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament ("Thou shalt not kill", “Thou shalt not steal", “Thou shalt not commit adultery", “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”, ...) are the Judeo-Christian version of universal moral norms that can be found in virtually every society. In traditional, pre-industrial societies such rules are usually seen as the will of a benevolent omnipotent deity or other supreme supernatural power. Revealed by such a higher power, they claim absolute truth with absolute validity (Inglehart 1990: 184, 1997: 37-38, 88, Inglehart/Baker 2000: 25).

In traditional, pre-industrial societies absolute and steadfast rules basically serve two functions, a societal and a psychological one (Inglehart 1990: 177-179, 1997: 40-42). From the perspective of the society, absolute rules are crucial for the long-term viability of a society. The moral rule “Thou shalt not kill”, for example, serves the social function of restricting violence to narrow, predictable channels. Without such a moral rule, a society would tear itself apart (Inglehart 1997: 40). In traditional societies, the family represents the basic unit for reproduction. Moral rules like “Thou shalt not commit adultery” therefore serve the societal function of maintaining the family as the key economic unit for reproduction. As long as abortion, divorce, and homosexuality seem to threaten reproduction and child-rearing within the family, they are condemned harshly by the society. This applies to all traditional, pre-industrial societies with few exceptions (Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 7, Inglehart/Baker 2000: 23).

From the perspective of the individual, absolute rules serve a psychological function too. In traditional, pre-industrial societies people have little control over nature. Living in a highly uncertain environment where the individual is endangered in daily life by existential threats (crop failure, starvation, untreatable diseases), people are under a high level of stress. People in danger need to be sure what is going to happen, their “margin for error is slender and they need maximum predictability” (Inglehart 1990: 177, 1997: 40). In order to compensate for their lack of physical control over nature and to reduce the resulting stress, people appeal to metaphysical powers, which seem to have control over the world. The benevolence of such higher powers can be gained by strictly following the rules, which ensures maximal predictability. In this way, absolute rule obedience and the belief that an infallible higher power will ensure that things turn out well, at least in the long run, fulfil basic physical and economic...

A central characteristic of modernisation is industrialisation, which transforms *agrarian, pre-industrial societies* into *industrial societies* (Inglehart/Baker 2000: 20-21, Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 25-31). During this phase, a growing sense of technological control over nature replaces the psychological need for reliance on supernatural powers. In increasingly rationalized and secularised societies, the capability of traditional religious authorities to legitimise basic moral rules becomes more and more undermined.

In the course of the European Enlightenment, Kant (1785/2007: 421/31, 1785/1996: 421/68) established the Categorical Imperative “act only in accordance with the maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law” as the moral principle with which to test whether a rule can claim universally absolute validity. Therefore, the validity of moral rules is no longer dependent on divine authority, but instead is based on pure practical reason. Despite based on a secular foundation, moral rules retain their status as unconditionally and unexceptionally valid duties (Nunner-Winkler 1996b: 128-129, 2009: 31). This strict universalistic status is restricted to negative duties, i.e., to duties of omission such as “You should not kill, steal, lie” which prevent others from being directly harmed (Nunner-Winkler 1989: 34-35, 1996a: 19-20). Positive duties are obligations to act such as “Do your duty” (caring duties for own children, parents, or spouse) or “Keep your promise”. They are undertaken by individuals and establish relationships of cooperation. Universally existing positive duties serve the purpose of preventing others from being harmed indirectly by not fulfilling legitimately existing expectations (Nunner-Winkler 1989: 34-35, 1994: 240, 1996a: 20, 1996b: 129, 1997: 368, 1999: 304). As duties of omission, negative duties are not resource-bound and cannot come into conflict with each other. According to Kant (Tugendhat 1993: 149, 328, Nunner-Winkler 1996b: 129, 2009: 31), negative duties have strict priority over positive duties. Therefore, negative duties can and must be observed by everyone under all circumstances (Nunner-Winkler 1989: 34, 1996a: 20, 1997: 368). Thus, according to Kant, strict, universally valid moral rules do exist. Since negative duties cannot conflict, and have strict priority over positive duties, for all moral questions there can be only one morally justifiable action (Nunner-Winkler 1996b: 129-130, 2009: 31).
Such a strict moral absolutism/universalism also has its costs: even lying in order to prevent a potential murderer from finding an intended victim, is not permissible according to Kant (1797: A306-308/1993a: 639, 1797/1993b: 65). This unconditional validity of negative duties can not only be traced back to logical consistency, but it is also the result of Kant’s still religiously-based world view, where people are only responsible for the right action. The consequences of right actions can still be assigned to God, who created the world as the world is (Nunner-Winkler 1996a: 24, 2000: 302). This position was classified more than a hundred years later by Weber (1919/1958: 539-541, 1919/2010: 358-362) as an ethic of principled conviction ("Gesinnungsethik"). In more and more secularising societies, however, it becomes increasingly impossible to assign responsibility for the consequences of right actions to God or other supernatural powers who created the world as it is (Nunner-Winkler 1994: 239). For this reason, Weber (1919/1958: 539-541, 1919/2010: 358-362, 367-368, cf. also Nunner-Winkler 1996a: 24) posited an ethic of responsibility ("Verantwortungsethik") in which people must also become responsible for the foreseeable consequences of their actions\(^4\).

According to Inglehart (Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 7, 25-31), the unprecedented economic prosperity in the decades after the Second World War, together with the emergence of the welfare state, provided the conditions for the second phase of modernisation, which transforms advanced industrial societies into post-industrial societies. The establishment of a welfare state allowed the ultimate responsibility for the survival of citizens to be transferred from the family to the state. As a consequence, the functional basis for moral rules which reinforce the two-parent heterosexual family was eroded: the survival of children no longer depended on a functioning two-parent family and the survival of parents in old age no longer relied on the support of their children (Inglehart 1990: 178, 1997: 40-41, Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 29). The historically unprecedented economic prosperity and the welfare state also reduced the individual’s psychological need for absolute rules (cf. Inglehart 1997: 40). Most people living in post-industrial societies take for granted a minimum standard of living and a life expectancy of nearly 80 years. Hence, people can increasingly focus on goals beyond immediate survival, which enables them to give self-expression values higher priority (Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 28).
Economic development is also connected with an expansion of the education system, which increases cognitive skills within the population (cf., for instance, Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 28). As a consequence, an increasing share of the population fulfills the cognitive requirements that, according to Kohlberg (1976: 31-33, Colby/Kohlberg 1986: 141-147, Colby et al. 1987: 12-22, cf. also Dülmer 2001: 3-5), are necessary for a transition from the conventional to the post-conventional level of moral development. This transition is characterised by a shift from an almost unreserved orientation towards traditional religious or prevailing social rules and conventions to a level where the individual for the first time questions such internalised rules with respect to their genuine moral meaning. This progress enables the individual to distinguish better between purely culture-specific conventions and universally valid moral rules and principles (Nunner-Winkler 1996a: 19-21). Therefore, more and more people become able to apply context-sensitive moral rules by taking into account the potential consequences of rule obedience when judging the rightness or the wrongness of action (Nunner-Winkler 2000: 302).

There is an important distinction between questioning and applying moral rules, which perfectly fits Habermas’s (1991a: 94-95/1993a: 128-129 and 1991c: 140/1993c: 37) distinction between discourses of justification and discourses of application. The aim of the former is the argumentative justification or critique of moral rules, norms, and principles. By the principle of universalisation the universal validity of moral rules and norms can be tested. A contested rule or norm, according to Habermas (1983: 103/1990: 93), is justified only if “all affected can freely accept the consequences and side effects that the general observance of a controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each individual”. As such, it implicitly includes equality, which is de facto always presupposed by formal, process-oriented contract theories about morality: equality is the norm, inequality has to be justified (Nunner-Winkler 1996a: 19, 2000: 300-302, 2001: 316). However, according to Nunner-Winkler (1996a: 19, 1997: 386, 2000: 300-302), the principle of equality has to be complemented by the principle of harm avoidance, which can be derived anthropologically from the vulnerability of human beings and their common interest in not being harmed without reason. This second principle constitutes the interest-based, substantive core of morality. Taken together, equality and harm avoidance are assumed to be the two minimal principles of a rationally justifiable, inner-worldly
morality. Following these principles we can derive a number of universally valid rules, among them universal negative duties that directly forbid harming others and culture-specific positive duties that protect others from being harmed indirectly as a result of unfulfilled expectations which legitimately exist\textsuperscript{5}.

The aim of discourses of application is the argumentative justification of actions in concrete situations. The purpose of such discourses is twofold. The first purpose consists in finding out which of the norms and rules accepted as valid are appropriate in the light of all relevant features of a particular situation (principle of appropriateness, Habermas 1991a: 96/1993a: 130, 1991b: 114/1993b: 14, 1991c: 140/1993c: 37). The second one consists in whether the foreseeable consequences of following a rule are reasonable in a given situation or whether an exception is morally justifiable (Habermas 1991b: 115/1993b: 14, 1991c: 170-175/1993c: 64-68, cf. also Werner 2006: 149).

If the principle of harm avoidance becomes part of the core of a rationally justifiable, inner-worldly morality, then conflicts can arise between negative and positive duties as well as between following a universally valid moral rule and the reasonableness of the foreseeable consequences of following the rule. If rules can conflict and consequences have to be taken into account, then application cases exist where harm reduction, judged from the perspective of impartiality, permits an exception to a valid moral rule (Nunner-Winkler 1996a: 19, 1997: 368-369). Therefore, universally valid moral rules become \textit{prima facie} duties (Ross 1930/2002: 19-20) that allow exceptions under certain circumstances: “grey areas of moral dissent” (Nunner-Winkler 1994: 239, 1996a 24, 1997: 369) arise. In part, such grey areas can be attributed to insufficient knowledge coupled with uncertainties in the predictability of expected consequences as well as to disagreement about the evaluation of the consequences (Nunner-Winkler 1996a: 24-25, 1996b: 136-137). However, despite this fact, according to Nunner-Winkler (1996a: 19), a multitude of situations exist where an unambiguous answer can be given to the question of whether an action is morally justifiable or not: violating a universally valid moral rule out of pure self-interest at the expense of others is, and remains, morally wrong.

Moral judgement behaviour is shaped not only by the process of modernisation.
Although socio-economic development brings major predictable changes in society and culture, cultural traditions continue to leave a lasting imprint on a society’s worldview (Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 4-5, 19-23). A high potential for cross-cultural differences can be expected in situations where modernisation has eroded the functional basis of traditional rules and where existing universally valid prima facie rules conflict with the evaluation of the reasonableness of possible consequences. However, situations where an existing universally valid prima facie rule would be violated out of pure self-interest, at the expense of others, should not be affected by such differences⁶.

3. Moral Judgement Behaviour and its Determinants

In the following, two different types of hypotheses will be derived from theory. The first type concerns the existence of moral grey areas, which will be tested by cross-country comparisons regarding the level of the moral justifiability of different behaviour. The second type of hypotheses are about the impact of respondent- as well as country-level characteristics on individual moral judgment behaviour, which will be tested simultaneously by conducting multilevel analyses.

According to Nunner-Winkler, in modern societies harm avoidance becomes the interest based, substantive core of a rationally justifiable, inner-worldly morality. As people in modernising societies become increasingly responsible for the foreseeable consequences of strictly following universally valid moral rules, grey areas of moral dissent should arise. Based on these considerations it is expected that in situations where universally valid prima facie rules conflict with other duties or with the reasonableness of potential negative consequences, modernisation should cause considerable differences between countries in terms of how morally justifiable, on average, a behaviour is seen to be (hypothesis H1a). The same might also be true for culture (hypothesis H2a). However, violating universally valid moral prima facie rules out of pure self-interest at the expense of others, according to Nunner-Winkler, is, and remains, morally wrong. Based on this assumption it is expected that acting out of pure self-interest at the expense of others should be seen by virtually every society as morally unjustifiable. This expectation should hold, independent of the degree of modernisation (hypothesis H1b) and of the culture a society belongs to (hypothesis H2b).
If, as assumed, modernisation has an impact on moral change by fostering an understanding of existing moral guidelines as prima facie rules, then modernisation should have a significant positive influence on the justifiability of behaviour in situations where a moral rule conflicts with the reasonableness of potential negative consequences. Modernisation, however, is expected to have no significant influence on moral judgment behaviour in situations where a universally valid moral rule is violated out of pure self-interest at the expense of others (hypothesis H3a). Culture might also have a lasting imprint on our moral judgement behaviour. A possible impact of culture, however, should be restricted to situations where a moral rule conflicts with the reasonableness of the foreseeable negative consequences of a respective behaviour (hypothesis H3b).

For the respondent level, the first hypothesis can be derived from the theory of moral development, which essentially goes back to Kohlberg. Within this tradition, moral development depends on cognitive development. The latter is fostered by formal education, which is seen by authors like Nunner-Winkler (1988: 245) or Rest (1988: 183) as the central factor for moral development. Hence, the highly educated are the most likely to reach the post-conventional level of moral development, and are therefore better able than the less well educated to distinguish between situations where unreasonable consequences allow an exception to be made and where not. Based on these considerations it is expected that the higher the level of education, the more an individual is assumed to take into account potential negative consequences of strictly following a universally valid moral rule. In situations where others would be harmed out of pure self-interest, however, education is expected to have no impact, or even a negative impact, on the moral justifiability of such harmful behaviour (hypothesis H4).

Modernisation has not only increased people’s resources but by establishing a modern welfare state, it has also reduced external constraints, for instance, in the area of family and sexual morality. For those growing up in this different formative environment, the psychological need for strict rule obedience is declining, which allows younger cohorts to become more tolerant than older ones (Inglehart 1997: 23, Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 46). Hence, the second respondent-level hypothesis is as follows: younger cohorts are expected to be more willing to accept a deviation from
an existing moral rule than older cohorts. Since simple adaptation to a more tolerant environment by content-related learning processes not necessarily includes a deeper understanding of moral rules and principles, younger cohorts are also expected to be more tolerant in accepting a deviation from an existing, universally valid moral rule in situations where violating the moral rule does not contribute to harm avoidance (hypothesis H5).

Religious needs, according to Inglehart (1997: 42, Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 27), are psychological needs for security that are fulfilled by strict obedience to religious norms and rules. The established churches are, at least in Europe, the most important institutions for imparting basic moral and religious rules as well as the belief in their unconditional validity (Döbert/Nunner-Winkler 1986: 305). For this reason, the last respondent-level hypotheses are as follows: members of a religious denomination (hypothesis H6) and people to whom religion is important (hypothesis H7) are assumed, in their moral judgment behaviour, to be more likely than others to insist on strict rule obedience. This relationship is expected to hold independently of whether a moral rule is generally violated out of pure self-interest at the expense of others or whether it is generally done for reasons of harm avoidance with respect to the reasonableness of potential negative consequences.

4. Data and Operationalisations

The following analyses are based on the fourth wave of the European Values Study (EVS 2010). The fieldwork for most of the participating countries was conducted in 2008. A big advantage of this study is that with a few exceptions (Andorra, Azerbaijan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Vatican) it covers all European countries. In sum, the combined data set includes samples from 47 European societies, whereby East and West Germany as well as Cyprus and Northern Cyprus are treated as separate samples.

For testing our hypotheses the following five questions on the justifiability of different behaviour (discourses of application) were selected: “someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties”, “cheating on tax if you have the chance”, “lying in your own interest”, “abortion”, and “divorce”. The first three items were selected for the reason that they measure moral justifiability in situations where moral rules are
generally violated out of pure self-interest at the expense of others. Lying is already for the reason interesting to analyse, since it was explicitly selected by Kant as an example in defence of moral universalism/absolutism. Abortion is an example of an application where the negative duty not to kill may conflict with the reasonability of the foreseeable consequences of continuing the pregnancy. The second example for such a situation is divorce: although marriage is a mutual promise that can be dissolved in principle, divorce may sometimes lead to unreasonable hardship and so result in a moral grey area. Besides this, it might also conflict with internalised traditional religious norms. The answer scale for these five items range from 0 (“never”) to 9 (“always”).

At the *country level*, the degree of modernisation and cultural zones will be included in the analyses as predictor variables. The degree of modernisation is measured by the Human Development Index (HDI, cf. UNDP 2011a), which is computed as the geometric mean of a society’s health status (life expectancy at birth), a society’s level of knowledge (mean and expected year of schooling), and a society’s decent standard of living (logarithm of the gross national income per capita in US dollars corrected for purchasing power parity, cf. UNDP 2011b). To make the index less dependent on short-term fluctuations, for each society the average of the HDI across the years 2005 to 2008 was computed. For the included countries, Moldova had the lowest mean (0.614) and Norway the highest (0.935). Cultural zones are measured via the type of religious culture (Norris/Inglehart 2004: 45-57) which is based on a society’s historically predominant major religion. The classification distinguishes Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, and Eastern religious cultures. Only the first four are covered by the EVS 2008. A further cultural factor that has a lasting imprint on a society is a communist heritage (Inglehart/Welzel 2005: 73, Inglehart 2006: 124). To capture the impact of the cultural zones and communist heritage, 0-1 dummy coding is used for our analyses.

At the respondent level, education, cohorts, belonging to a religious denomination, importance of religion, and gender will be included as predictor variables. For education, two 0-1 coded dummy variables were computed, one for secondary education (47 per cent of the respondents) and one for tertiary education (23 per cent of the respondents). The reference category includes respondents with a maximum of
lower secondary education (30 per cent of the respondents). Since Inglehart (1981: 886-887) assumes a “significant watershed between the post-war generation and the older groups that had experienced the World Wars, the Great Depression and their associated threats to economic and physical security”, 1946 was chosen as starting point for distinguishing the three cohorts born before 1946, between 1946 and 1965, and between 1966 and 1991. The two youngest cohorts are each distinguished by a 0-1 coded dummy variable from the oldest cohort that serves as the reference group. Belonging to a religious denomination is again a 0-1 coded dummy variable (1 stands for “no denomination”). The importance of religion is measured on a four-point scale, ranging from 0 (“not at all important”) to 3 (“very important”). Finally, gender will be included in analyses as a 0-1 coded dummy variable, with male used as the reference category.

In order to level off different sample sizes, a weight was used to ensure that all countries are equally weighted without increasing the total sample size. All multilevel models were estimated with the multilevel programme HLM 7.02.

5. Empirical Results

To get a first impression of how justifiable the five selected items are seen as, and how big the consensus is between countries as well as between respondents with respect to judgement behaviour, an empty multilevel ANOVA-model was estimated (Table 1). None of the respective grand means for bribery (0.731), tax evasion (1.214), and lying in own interest (1.544) is higher than 2.25. This value marks the border between the lowest quarter on the answer scale, in which a respective behaviour is seen as never justifiable, and the middle part of the answer scale, which covers the moral grey area that ranges from 2.25 to 6.75. The grand mean for abortion (3.232) and divorce (4.374), however, are between 2.25 and 6.75, and therefore fall into the grey area of moral dissent. So far, our distinction between behaviour where universally valid moral prima facie rules are generally violated out of pure self-interest at the expense of others, and behaviour where potential negative consequences might justify an exception to a moral prima facie rule, is corroborated. As can be seen from the variance decomposition, the agreement (as indicated by a low variance component) regarding the justifiability of bribery, tax evasion, and lying in own interest is much higher than the agreement with respect to the justifiability of
abortion and divorce. This applies to the country level as well as to the respondent level. Inter-country agreement is lowest for abortion (1.856) while inter-respondent agreement is lowest for divorce (7.491). By far the highest inter-country as well as inter-respondent agreement exists concerning the non-justifiability of bribery (0.173 and 2.418, respectively).

Table 1: Means for the Moral Justifiability of Different Behaviours and its Variance Decomposition (Multilevel ANOVA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is …</th>
<th>Justifiable?</th>
<th>Bribery</th>
<th>Tax Evasion</th>
<th>Lying (in own interest)</th>
<th>Abortion</th>
<th>Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country Level:</td>
<td>n = 47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Level:</td>
<td>n = 63,161</td>
<td>62,840</td>
<td>63,122</td>
<td>61,729</td>
<td>62,236</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Mean ($\gamma_{oo}$)</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td>1.214</td>
<td>1.544</td>
<td>3.232</td>
<td>4.374</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variance Decomposition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Country Level ($\tau_{oo}$)</th>
<th>Respondent Level ($\sigma^2$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country Level ({$\tau_{oo}$})</td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>2.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Level ({$\sigma^2$})</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>4.106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proportion of Country Level Variance in the Total Variance (ICC)

| | .067 | .061 | .074 | .201 | .171 |

Data: EVS 2008; all variance components for the country level, according to the chi-square-test, are highly significant (p ≤ 0.01). In modern multilevel analyses, significance tests replace the ICC, which was previously used as a rule of thumb in order to decide whether a multilevel model was needed or not.

Weighted data (all countries equally weighted without changing the total number of interviews); Full Maximum-Likelihood

In order to test our hypotheses about the impact of country as well as respondent characteristics on moral judgment behaviour, a multilevel model was estimated for each of the five types of behaviour (Table 2). Predictors for the country level in the upper part of Table 2 are slightly indented to the right, which better distinguishes between country level and respondent level predictors. Religious needs, according to Inglehart, are psychological needs for security that are fulfilled by strict rule obedience. Empirically hypothesis H6 is confirmed: people without denomination are significantly more convinced than those who belong to a denomination that bribery (b = 0.099), tax evasion (b = 0.101), lying in own interest (b = 0.123), abortion (b = 0.417), and divorce (b = 0.293) can be morally justified. The same applies to importance of religion (H7): the more important religion is in the life of a respondent, the less he or she thinks that any of these five behaviours is morally justifiable. Since the formative conditions in which younger cohorts grew up were
less constrained than that of the older cohorts, the psychological need for strict rule obedience declined, which, according to Inglehart, allows younger cohorts to become more tolerant than older ones. Empirically, hypothesis H5 is confirmed: the expected answer pattern becomes significant for all selected application cases, independent of whether a universally valid moral rule is violated out of pure self-interest at the expense of others or not. The first time the observed answer pattern differs across the five selected items is for education. The highly educated are significantly more tolerant than the low educated regarding abortion \( (b = 0.840) \) and divorce \( (b = 0.847) \), i.e., in situations where following a moral rule may conflict with the reasonableness of the foreseeable negative consequences of strictly following the rule. At the same time no educational effect is found for lying in own interest. The highly educated, however, are significantly less tolerant than the low educated with respect to bribery \( (b = -0.139) \) and tax evasion \( (b = -0.136) \). So far, these results confirm hypothesis H4: education fosters a moral understanding according to which universally valid moral rules exist, but when applied only possess the status of prima facie rules. Taken together, the empirical results for cohorts and education also confirm that adapting to the prevailing environmental conditions of one’s formative years by content-related socialisation influences and grasping the purpose of moral rules is not the same by far. Finally, women are significantly less tolerant than men with respect to bribery and tax evasion, but significantly more tolerant with lying in own interest, abortion, and divorce. Such differences in moral judgment behaviour are at least known for the justifiability of abortion and conscientious objection to military services, and are interpreted by the authors (Döbert/Nunner-Winkler 1986: 312-313, Nunner-Winkler 1996b: 133-134) as differences in how far woman and men are potentially affected personally by such behaviour. The gender that is more likely to be affected by potential negative consequences (i.e., the costs of following a rule) places more weight on these consequences than the less affected gender. It follows that the observed differences regarding bribery and tax evasion might be caused by the higher employment rate of males.
The Impact of Modernisation and Culture on Morality and Moral Change in Europe:
From Universalism to Contextualism

Table 2: Determinants of the Moral Justifiability of Different Behaviours (Multilevel Regression Analyses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is …</th>
<th>Bribery</th>
<th>Tax Evasion</th>
<th>Lying (in own interest)</th>
<th>Abortion</th>
<th>Divorce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justifiable?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country Level</td>
<td>R²</td>
<td>21.86 %</td>
<td>31.44 %</td>
<td>29.01 %</td>
<td>61.97 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent Level</td>
<td>R²</td>
<td>3.44 %</td>
<td>4.66 %</td>
<td>6.34 %</td>
<td>20.15 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>.1976</td>
<td>.235**</td>
<td>.236**</td>
<td>.102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDI 2005-2008</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-1.426</td>
<td>-.967</td>
<td>-.821</td>
<td>4.114*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Culture</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.044</td>
<td>-.139</td>
<td>-.406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Culture</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-.130</td>
<td>-.293*</td>
<td>-.434**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox Culture</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-.149</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Culture</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-.101</td>
<td>-.571**</td>
<td>-.297*</td>
<td>-.560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Post-) Communism</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (low)</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (middle)</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>-.045</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.492**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (high)</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-.139**</td>
<td>-.136**</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.840**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born before 1946</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born 1946-65</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>.152**</td>
<td>.290**</td>
<td>.300**</td>
<td>.479**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born 1966-93</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>.425**</td>
<td>.612**</td>
<td>.746**</td>
<td>.548**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Denomination</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>.099**</td>
<td>.101*</td>
<td>.123**</td>
<td>.417**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Religion</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-.074**</td>
<td>-.154**</td>
<td>-.205*</td>
<td>-.628**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (1 = Female)</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>-.150**</td>
<td>-.270**</td>
<td>.196**</td>
<td>.235**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data: EVS 2008; * p ≤ 0.05; ** p ≤ 0.01 (one-tailed test for hypotheses with assumed causal direction); countries: n = 47, respondents: n = 62,729 (min.) – 63,161 (max.); all respondent-level b-coefficients turned out to differ significantly across countries and had to be estimated with a variance component (Snijders/Bosker 2004: 43-44); the pseudo R²'s are calculated according to the simplified formula of Snijders/Bosker (1994); Weighted data (all countries equally weighted without changing the total number of interviews); Full Maximum-Likelihood; Robust Standard Errors

In hypothesis H3 it is stated that modernisation fosters an understanding of existing moral guidelines as prima facie rules. If this expectation is right, then modernisation should have a significant positive impact on the justifiability of behaviour in situations where a moral rule conflicts with the reasonableness of potential negative consequences, but no influence in situations where a universally valid moral rule is violated out of pure self-interest at the expense of others. The empirical results confirm this hypothesis: the Human Development Index 2005 to 2008 only becomes significant for abortion (b = 4.114) and divorce (b = 8.741). These unstandardized b-coefficients measure the change in the answer scale for the justifiability of abortion and divorce respectively, if the Human Development Index changes by 1 unit. The maximum change in the HDI, however, is 0.321 (=0.935−0.641 , respective values for Norway and Moldova). Therefore, within the observed range the maximum impact of modernisation is 1.321 (=4.114 · 0.321) scale points for abortion and 2.806 (=8.741 · 0.321) scale points for divorce. Although modernisation, according to Inglehart and
Welzel, brings major predicable changes in societies, cultural traditions as measured by religious culture and a communist past are assumed to leave a lasting imprint on a society’s worldview. A relatively high potential for differences caused by cultural traditions, however, is only expected for application cases where modernisation has eroded the functional basis of traditional rules and where existing universally valid rules conflict with the evaluation of the reasonableness of possible negative consequences. Empirically it turns out that a communist past has no impact on the moral justifiability of any of the five selected behaviours. In order to test the maximal impact of religious culture, the most tolerant religious culture was selected as reference group for each behaviour. The empirical results show that religious culture has no significant impact on the moral justifiability of bribery, abortion, and divorce. Against hypothesis H3b, however, both Muslim and Protestant religious cultures are significantly more restrictive when it comes to tax evasion (b = -0.571 and -0.293, respectively) and lying in own interest (b = -0.297 and -0.434, respectively) than the Orthodox religious culture. The question that now arises is whether these differences, although significant, are sufficiently big to push a country or even a whole cultural zone into the moral grey area. In other words: Are there societies or cultural zones where harming others out of pure self-interest is seen as morally justifiable?

In order to answer this question, the society-specific means for the moral justifiability of tax evasion and lying in own interest are depicted in Figures 1a and 1b. The abscissa displays the Human Development Index 2005 to 2008, the ordinate the country-specific means for the justifiability of a respective behaviour. The types of religious culture are distinguished by different shapes, while former communist societies are distinguished from societies that have never been communist by black and grey shapes, respectively. The dotted horizontal lines mark the borders where the moral grey area starts and where it ends (points 2.25 and 6.75 on the justifiability scale, respectively). The average for tax evasion in Belarus is 2.852. This is the only country where the country mean is slightly above the threshold that separates the lowest quarter, where a particular behaviour is seen as unjustifiable, from the middle section that covers the moral grey area. Although in this respect Belarus is a slightly deviating country, in no religious culture is tax evasion seen as morally justifiable. The same applies to bribery, where the highest observed mean for a country is 1.919 (not depicted by a figure). Based on these results, hypotheses H1b and H2b
The Impact of Modernisation and Culture on Morality and Moral Change in Europe:
From Universalism to Contextualism

Figure 1a: Modernisation, Culture and the Justifiability of Tax Evasion

For comparison: in Japan in 2010 the mean for the justifiability of tax evasion was 0.312 (WVS 1981-2014)

Figure 1b: Modernisation, Culture and the Justifiability of Lying in Own Interest

Note: No data for Japan in 2010 available (question not asked in the WVS 2010-2014)
are confirmed: neither religious culture nor modernisation push a society into the moral grey area, if a universal moral principle is violated out of pure self-interest at the expense of others. If we look at lying to serve one’s own interest, however, we find four countries (Belarus: 3.014, Russian Federation: 2.723, Belgium: 2.644, West Germany: 2.316) where the country specific mean is at least slightly above the threshold of 2.25 where the moral grey area begins.

Since the four slightly deviating countries belong to different cultural zones and have quite different degrees of modernisation, this result certainly does not disconfirm hypotheses H1b and H2b. Nonetheless, this result is worth further analysis. “Lying in your own interest” was probably originally intended to measure “lying in your own interest at the expense of others”. Such behaviour, according to the minimal principles of morality, is surely not justifiable. However, from psychology it is known that lying to serve one’s own interest does not necessarily mean that others are harmed: “sometimes lying causes harm to the ones who are lied to, but many lies told in daily life are white lies that may even benefit the lie receivers” (Vrij 2008: 7). Furthermore, “[s]ocial lies are told for psychological reasons and serve both self-interest and the interest of others” (Vrij 2008: 21) and for this reason fulfil a social function. This can be illustrated by the following examples: In all probability no close friend, upon being asked, would tell a couple that their newborn baby is pretty ugly or that a communal meal the couple had prepared was terrible. In order to see whether the distinction between “lying in your own interest” and “lying in your own interest at the expense of others” might give a possible explanation of why the former falls into the moral grey area in some societies, in October 2014 a split half experiment was conducted during a sociological methods lecture at the University of Cologne in Germany. The question battery used for the experiment consisted of 13 items that were adopted from the European Values Study 2008. The first version of the questionnaire included the original wording of the European Values Study, the second version the extended one. Furthermore, at position 10 an additional item was included that covers the moral justifiability of theft. For this item a split half experiment was conducted too: the wording for the first version was “if someone takes 5 Euros” and for the second one “if someone takes 1000 Euros”. Strict rule obedience (moral universalism/absolutism) in this case would mean that the amount of money should have no impact on the moral justifiability of such behaviour. By also taking into account potential negative
consequences (moral contextualism/restricted universalism) a difference in moral judgement behaviour can be expected. The questionnaires for the two versions were assigned randomly to the 386 students who participated in the lecture. The results of the split half experiment can be found in Figure 2.

As can be seen from Figure 2, the mean values for the justifiability of the items that were identical for both versions of the questionnaire are nearly the same in both groups. None of the observed small differences becomes statistically significant. The same, however, does not apply to the two different versions of the remaining two items: the mean for “lying in your own interest” and “lying in your own interest at the expense of others” is 3.309 and 1.503, respectively. The difference on the 10-point answer scale amounts to 1.899 scale points and becomes highly significant ($p \leq 0.01$). Whereas the mean for “lying in your own interest” is higher than 2.25 and for this reason clearly falls into the moral grey area, “lying in your own interest at the expense of others” is clearly below the threshold. This result confirms that harming others out of pure self-interest is unjustifiable. The mean for stealing 5 Euros and stealing 1000 Euros is 1.899 and 1.139, respectively. The observed difference of 0.760 scale points becomes highly significant ($p \leq 0.01$), which shows that the amount of harm caused...
by a behaviour is taken into account in the moral judgment of the students. However, since both means are clearly below the threshold of 2.25, i.e., the point where the moral grey area starts, stealing is not seen as morally justifiable in either of the two application cases.

Finally, we should at least take a short look at a situation where a universally valid moral rule may conflict with the reasonableness of potential negative consequences. In Figure 3 the relationship between modernisation, culture and the justifiability of abortion is depicted. From the figure it becomes clear that modernisation does indeed foster a moral understanding where moral rules are seen as prima facie rules. When such rules conflict with the reasonableness of potential negative consequences, grey areas of moral dissent arise. Hence, this result corroborates hypothesis H1a. Although the potential for cultural differences is comparatively high in conditions where moral rules conflict with potential negative consequences, such a pattern is neither visible in Figure 3 (hypothesis H2a), nor was it confirmed by the previously conducted multilevel analysis. This, however, does not mean that no cultural differences will be found in other application cases that fall into the area of legitimate moral dissent.

Figure 3: Modernisation, Culture and the Justifiability of Abortion

For comparison: in Japan in 2010 the mean for the justifiability of abortion was 3.765 (WVS 1981-2014)
6. Conclusions

The main aim of this article was to test hypotheses about the impact of modernisation on moral change in Europe. Negative duties such as “You should not kill, steal, or cheat” are universally valid rules which exist in virtually every society. In traditional, pre-industrial societies where people have little control over nature, people rely on the benevolence of metaphysical powers, which requires strict rule obedience to maximise predictability and thus reduce psychological stress. Therefore, pre-industrial societies are characterised by moral universalism/absolutism. During the first phase of modernisation, traditional, pre-industrial societies become transformed into industrial societies, where people develop an increasing sense of technical control over nature. Increasing rationalisation and secularisation undermine the capability of traditional religious authority to legitimise basic moral rules. Even with a secular foundation, negative duties retain their status as unconditionally and unexceptionally valid moral rules. The historically unprecedented economic prosperity in the decades after World War II and the emergence of the welfare state provided the basis for the second phase of modernisation, which transforms industrial societies into post-industrial societies. Under conditions of physical and economic security, the psychological need for strict rule obedience is declining, which allows younger cohorts to become more tolerant. As societies become more secularised, it becomes increasingly difficult to assign the consequences of strict rule obedience to God or other supernatural powers. Instead, people have to take responsibility for the consequences of their own actions. As harm avoidance becomes part of the core of an interest-based, rationally justifiable, inner-worldly morality, in application cases conflicts develop between negative and positive duties as well as between a universally valid moral rule and the reasonableness of the foreseeable negative consequences of following the rule. As a result, universally valid moral rules become prima facie rules and grey areas of moral dissent arise. Due to this change, post-industrial societies are characterised by a moral contextualism/restricted moral universalism. Since context-sensitive application of moral rules requires cognitive skills, the more highly educated should be better able to distinguish under what conditions a moral rule has to be followed and when a deviation from such prima facie rules might be morally justifiable.

To test our hypotheses, we followed this distinction by selecting bribery, tax
evasion, and lying in your own interest as three application cases where moral rules, in general, are violated out of pure self-interest at the expense of others. Abortion and divorce were chosen as application cases where a negative duty may conflict with the reasonableness of potential negative consequences of strict rule obedience. Based on these considerations, it was expected that virtually no society would see the first 3 behaviours as morally justifiable. Although for tax evasion and lying in own interest religious culture turned out to be significant, its impact was much too low to push even one cultural zone into the moral grey area. Despite the fact that a relatively big potential for cultural differences was expected for abortion and divorce, empirically at least for Europe no such evidence was found. As expected, modernisation turned out to be a powerful predictor for moral change from moral universalism toward moral contextualism: in more modern societies, people tend to take into account possible negative consequences when they pass a moral judgement. However, in general when behaviour violates a universally valid moral rule out of pure self-interest at the expense of others, it remains morally wrong in modern societies. This does not mean that it is impossible to find situations where even bribery or tax evasion might be morally justifiable, as the discussion about lying may have demonstrated. A further important result of this study confirms that the distinction between adapting to an environment by content-related learning processes and developing a deeper understanding is a fruitful one: Socialised under a historically unprecedented high level of physical and economical security, younger cohorts became morally more tolerant than older ones. Education on the other hand fosters a deeper understanding of moral rules, which allows the more highly educated to better distinguish between situations where moral rules are violated out of pure self-interest at the expense of others and situations where foreseeable negative consequences may justify an exception from a universally valid moral prima facie rule. Finally, members of religious denominations and people to whom religion is important have a more traditional understanding of morality and for this reason apply moral rules more strictly and less context-sensitively than less religious people. Taken together, the empirical results confirm the expected change from moral universalism/absolutism to moral contextualism/restricted moral universalism. This means that, within existing grey areas of moral dissent, it is the individual who becomes more responsible for making self-determined moral decisions that come closest to his or her moral conscience. In post-industrial societies, this comes about as strict laws of the past are
replaced by more liberal ones that take into account legitimate moral dissent more adequately.

1 Iceland legalised abortion for social reasons as soon as 1935. In Russia, abortion was legal between 1913 and 1936. The Soviet Union followed suit in 1955. In East Germany abortion was legalised for the first time in 1972 (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2016).

2 A similar version of this subchapter is published in Dülmer (2014).

3 Negative duties correspond to Rawls (1971: 109, 114-117) “negative natural duties”. Positive duties can be divided into strict positive duties, and broad positive “duties” such as “Do good” or “Practise charity” (Nunner-Winkler 1999: 304). Strict positive duties only apply to specific persons (one’s own children, a doctor’s patients) whereas broad positive “duties” apply to persons generally (Nunner-Winkler 1989: 35). In contrast to strict positive duties, not fulfilling the recommendation of broad positive “duties” is not negatively sanctioned: doing such things is good but it is not one’s obligation (Nunner-Winkler 1989: 37, 1999: 305).

4 Even today, strict rule obedience is comprehensible in circumstances where, for instance, a terminally ill person asks for the diagnosis: in order to protect people’s trust in medical diagnoses it is a doctor’s duty to tell the truth and not to lie in order to protect the patient from psychological suffering (Nunner-Winkler 1996a: 24).

5 Formally, positive duties such as “Keep your promise” are universally valid. The specific content of positive duties, however, varies between different societies and across different points in history (Nunner-Winkler 1996a: 20, 1997: 368, 2000: 301). Therefore, with respect to positive duties, different actions might be morally justifiable.

6 This article focusses on the principle of harm avoidance, which is central to the outlined change in the mode of the applicability of moral rules. The second dimension of moral change refers to the increasing inclusion of human beings to whom the principle of equality has to be applied (Nunner-Winkler 2009: 33). In this respect, modernisation is connected to the idea that people have to be treated equally, independent of their ethnicity, origin, sex, or other personal characteristics, beliefs, or attitudes (Nunner-Winkler 1997: 367, 2001: 316, 2009: 38-39, with reference to the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights). Inequality on the other hand has to be justified, for instance, by personal differences in achievement or need.

7 With respect to Eastern religious cultures, Huntington’s categorisation (1996/2003: 26-27), which also distinguishes between a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Sinic, and a Japanese civilisation, is probably the theoretically better one.

8 Although Belarus is the last remaining European country under communist rule, it is classified as a post-communist country for the reason that it has a communist past in common.
References


Habermas, Jürgen (1991b): Vom pragmatischen, ethischen und moralischen Gebrauch der Vernunft, in: Jürgen Habermas, Erläuterungen zur Diskursehtik. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 100-


The Impact of Modernisation and Culture on Morality and Moral Change in Europe:
From Universalism to Contextualism

Sociological Methods & Research, 22, 342-363.
UNDP (2011a): International Human Development Indicators – United Nations Development
  November 2011).
  Chichester: Wiley.
  and Ronald Speirs (Eds.). Weber: Political Writings. Cambridge: Cambridge University
WVS (1981-2014): World Values Survey, Longitudinal Aggregate v.20150418. JDSystems,
  Madrid, Spain (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWVL.jsp).