

MORAL SENTIMENTS IN MODERN SOCIETY

*A New Answer to
Classical Questions*

EDITED BY
GABRIËL VAN DEN BRINK



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Introduction

Gabriël van den Brink

For two centuries, the greatest minds have voiced their doubts about the morality of man and society. Scholars have argued that spiritual values are a function of social structures, neurological networks, economic interests, political power or dominant discourses. Philosophers and writers have taught us that ethical principles are little more than a fig leaf for our basest instincts. And whoever still believes in moral values only has to follow the news for a few days in order to realise that humanity betrays its ideals day in, day out. One would expect people in the modern age to have understood by now that morality is an illusion. But the opposite is the case. Moral questions are once again (or perhaps still) at the top of the agenda, and public debate is conducted in highly normative terms. This is why we initiated a study six years ago into the meaning of moral sentiments in modern society. Although empirical data was gathered on the situation in the Netherlands, the interpretation of the data is relevant for an international audience. In this introduction, we will briefly discuss three questions: Why did we conduct this study? Why is the case of the Netherlands so interesting? And why is the issue so timely now?

1 Why this topic?

Looking back on the past century, one is surprised at the levity with which many intellectuals peddled their ideas. Take Friedrich Nietzsche, who proclaimed the death of God one hundred years ago. Numerous philosophers, writers and scholars have felt moved to echo him, but history has proven otherwise: God is not dead. Large parts of the world continue to hold onto a faith in something divine. Indeed, in the last ten years we have seen a revival of religious interest in many modern countries – one that is also leaving its trace in the academic literature.

In the Netherlands, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR) was one of the first to pick up on this signal. In 2006, it published *Believing in the Public Domain*, a substantial collection of theoretical considerations and empirical findings to which more than twenty authors contributed. Although their conclusions differed, they were all convinced that religious life has gone

through a remarkable transformation that also has consequences for civic life.¹ The WRR was certainly not the only one who sensed the emergence of a new mood. The following year, the journalist Koert van der Velden, who works for the newspaper *Trouw*, published a book entitled *Religious Experiences*. His research for the book involved speaking to more than a hundred people in the Netherlands about how they experienced God. They described their encounter with the divine as a sudden experience that threw them off balance but at the same time gave them more zest for life.² Then Joep de Hart published a book, *Floating Believers*, in which he demonstrated the profusion of religious phenomena in the country, thereby disproving the notion that the Netherlands is a secular society.³ There are those who will shrug their shoulders about this type of book and believe that it is a Dutch aberration. But they would be shutting their eyes to the many studies on this topic that have appeared in the last ten years, also outside the Netherlands. To illustrate, there is the collection of essays edited by Hent de Vries, *Religion: Beyond a Concept*, in which 45 world-renowned scholars try to develop a new way of thinking about religion.⁴ There is Ulrich Beck's *Der Eigene Gott* which describes how a new type of spirituality is developing in the West, a development that poses both opportunities and risks.⁵ Or take *American Grace* in which Robert Putnam and David Campbell report on their investigation into the significance of religious differences in the United States.⁶ All this underlines the fact that a new theme has appeared on the intellectual horizon. Put another way, it illustrates the desire on the part of many researchers to reflect in a new way on an old subject.

On closer examination, this theme appears to be part of a general trend that boils down to the rediscovery of moral values, spiritual ideals and philosophical principles. This includes, for example, Susan Neiman's book entitled *Moral Clarity*. She argues that moral questions involve not academic issues but existential ones and that this is why the public discourse can never disregard moral issues.⁷ She was supported in her stance by Michael Sandel in his book *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* He opposes the idea that governments should never take a stand on moral issues. This is not only impossible, according to Sandel, it is also bad for the public good. In the

1 Donk, W. van de 2006.

2 Van der Velde 2007, Janssen 2008.

3 De Hart 2011.

4 De Vries 2008.

5 Beck 2008.

6 Putnam & Campbell 2010.

7 Neiman 2008.

debate on how to organise a just society, one's own ideas and preferences about the good life inevitably resonate.⁸ We would note that the theme of moral values or ideals has been taken up not only by political philosophers but also by scholars with an alternative background. For example, in his book *The Moral Landscape*, Sam Harris attempts to answer old questions about good and evil from a new angle – the neurosciences.⁹ Joshua Greene takes a behavioural theoretical perspective in his study entitled *Moral Tribes*.¹⁰ And the psychologist Jonathan Haidt looks for modern society's connection with ancient philosophical traditions such as Hinduism or Buddhism in his book, *The Happiness Hypothesis*.¹¹ Given this diversity of perspectives, we cannot expect to find a consensus on the right approach to moral issues anytime soon. But it does confirm that these issues have become highly topical in various areas of intellectual life.

The issue has even penetrated academic fields that have always avoided moral questions. The best example is the work of Frans de Waal, an ethologist who has discovered that forms of altruism and social behaviour also occur in animals. He believes that the human capacity for moral behaviour has an evolutionary basis. It is no coincidence that his most recent book is entitled *The Age of Empathy* and that it discusses what nature can teach us about creating a better society.¹² The importance of empathy is also brought to the attention of the general public in other ways. For instance, Marco Iacoboni's book *The Reflective Brain* outlines how mirror neurons affect our human interaction. They allow us to perceive what another person feels or intends, which then forms a basis for moral action.¹³ There is apparently growing interest in this theme, as the number of publications on this topic is expanding at a rapid pace. Within the Dutch language, books with titles such as *The Empathic Brain, Why We are More Social than We Think*,¹⁴ or *The Moral Brain: Evolution, Emotions and Ethics*¹⁵ appear regularly. Given the global popularity of the cognitive science approach, this is probably the case outside the Netherlands as well. A few scientists have attempted to synthesize insights from the life sciences, cognitive sciences and neurology. In his book *The Empathic Civilization*, Jeremy Rifkin writes that we are

8 Sandel 2010.

9 Harris 2010.

10 Greene 2013.

11 Haidt 2006.

12 De Waal 2009.

13 Iacoboni 2008.

14 Keysers 2012.

15 Tyra 2013.

moving into a new era – one that is no longer marked by reason but by empathy. According to Rifkin, the survival of human civilization essentially depends upon whether we are able to develop a global form of compassion.¹⁶

Against this background, it is not surprising that this book also addresses the issue of moral values and sentiments. We are not indifferent to the questions that have played an important role in the public and academic debate in the last ten years. At the same time, we hope to add something by linking this topic to the way in which modern society has developed over the past half century. That link is not obvious because most studies of modernity steer well clear of the topic of moral values. Therein lies the academic value of our book.

2 Why the Netherlands?

There are two trivial reasons the Netherlands was chosen for our research. First, it is a society that we know well because we live and work in it. And second, many aspects of this society have been documented, which is important if one is conducting empirical research. The most relevant question is, however, the extent to which the Netherlands is a suitable case if one wants to investigate the fate of moral values in modern society. And we believe this is the case on several counts.

To begin with, there are few countries where one can observe the functioning of modern society better than the Netherlands. I would even dare to say that it is one of the most modern societies in the world. This has everything to do with the birth of this country and its subsequent development. Several factors contributed to the rise of Holland as a world power in the seventeenth century. There was a developed money economy, trade networks that stretched around the world, an army that functioned in a rational manner, a high degree of urbanisation, and an urban bourgeoisie that was subjugated to a limited degree to the power of a national state. In other words, the former Republic had virtually everything we would expect to find in a modern society. This applies equally to the spiritual aspects that characterise modern life. There was a relatively tolerant climate in the Republic which led critical minds from all over Europe to take refuge there. Numerous scholarly works were published at this time, and cultural life exhibited an unprecedented boom.¹⁷ While we clearly cannot draw

¹⁶ Rifkin 2009.

¹⁷ Frijhoff & Spies 1999.

a straight line from the past to present-day Netherlands, many modern traits have prevailed over the centuries. Think of the importance of trade for the Netherlands and its strong international orientation; the influence of the urban bourgeoisie, with its penchant for egalitarian relationships; or even the spirit of liberalism and entrepreneurship, which are still very palpable today in Dutch cities. As a result of all this, the Netherlands was until recently the prime example of a modern and tolerant society, with its progressive laws drawing admiration from around the world. If one wants to examine in depth how moral sentiments and modern living interact, then I would venture to say that the Netherlands is a perfect case study.

This is all the more so because the Dutch are experiencing the full brunt of the crisis of modern living, a crisis that was incidentally predicted by few. Until well into the 1990s, the Netherlands was governed by a progressive elite that cherished enlightened ideals. Conflicts and possible tensions were resolved by mutual agreement. Many saw the emergence of multiculturalism as something that enriched society. Nationalist sentiments were regarded as outdated, and people were convinced that the world would become a better place as a result of globalisation. But around the turn of the millenium, more and more dark clouds began to gather over our peaceful social order, eventually culminating in a storm that broke loose over the polder. And hence the country that liked to think of itself as the champion of tolerance and openness was rocked twice by political assassinations. In 2001, the politician Pim Fortuyn, who was on the brink of winning the general elections, was shot dead by an activist. In 2004, Theo van Gogh, a well-known but controversial filmmaker, was stabbed to death by a supporter of radical Islam. In the years that followed, a type of national populism began to emerge that many had considered impossible. Large-scale resistance to the process of European integration began to develop, a process the Dutch business community had put all its money on. The issue of immigrants became a topic that engendered fierce clashes and one that every columnist felt compelled to address. The country's need for a strong leader grew, and the idea arose – especially abroad – that many Dutch people wanted to get rid of their open, tolerant and democratic tradition. While it is true that these changes also took place in other countries, the fact that this happened in a country that had first embraced freedom of conscience in Europe gave cause for reflection. This is one reason why our investigation into the fate of moral values could be relevant.

Another reason is economic. We already mentioned the strong international character of the Dutch economy. This causes business cycles to

have a particularly strong impact here, as was evident in the economic crisis that began in 2008 and whose effects are still being felt to this day. The crisis led to a programme of major cutbacks in public spending as part of the government's attempts to slim down the welfare system. The idea is that citizens and other social actors must themselves assume the tasks of a large part of the public service. However, this radical shift in policy masks the fact that the bureaucratic elite had adopted a neoliberal agenda much earlier. Already in the 1980s, the Netherlands had switched to a relatively radical (but little thought out) programme that had led to the privatisation and streamlining of many public services. This led to all sorts of problems in the public sector and frustrated the work of professionals. The result is that there has been much discussion in the Netherlands in the last decade about the practising of one's profession and also about moral or normative questions related to it. There is a high degree of dissatisfaction among professionals. This is also the case for many citizens who for one reason or another are not satisfied with the way politicians are representing them. Increasingly they are developing their own initiatives, sometimes sidestepping laws and regulations. Those who closely follow these trends in the Netherlands will notice that there is a revival of interest in public moral that is hardly acknowledged by established politicians. We are heading for an interesting and at the same time risky confrontation between moral values and political rules. This also makes the Netherlands a highly relevant case, as we can observe how modernity and morality interact with each other.

3 Why now?

Just as it is no coincidence that moral issues are playing a prominent role in the Netherlands, we would say that it is no coincidence that they are appearing right now. The more relevant question is what trends are contributing to this re-emergence of moral issues.

One cannot claim that moral issues have only become topical in recent years, as their history goes back a very long way. There have always been theologians, philosophers and historians who have explored this development in depth. Interestingly, some of them also appeal to a broad audience. This is the case with the theologian Karen Armstrong, who has been publishing books on the history of major world religions for many years. In *The Great Transformation*, she submits that inter alia Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have a number of values in

common.¹⁸ The philosopher Charles Taylor has forged another path. He has written a number of monumental works in which he analyses the meaning and genesis of modern humanism. Among other things, he asks why around the year 1500 every moral and spiritual striving inevitably referred back to God and why this is virtually unthinkable now, half a millennium later. With books such as *A Secular Time* and *Sources of the Self*, Taylor throws new light on contemporary forms of engagement. These authors are not the only ones who turn to the past to find answers to the question of how we should understand the spiritual life of our time.¹⁹ In *A History of Our Gods*, Frédéric Lenoir argues that we are witnessing a reversal of religious history. While monotheistic traditions have for centuries pursued some sort of rationalisation of religious life, we are now seeing a growing fascination with the emotional side of religion.²⁰ This illustrates that there are still researchers who reflect on the times we live in and who attempt to establish a relationship with the great moral questions of the past.

Apart from intellectual history, political affairs are also forcing us to deliberate anew on classic issues. Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the West assumed that other countries would welcome our model of democracy. Recent years have taught us that this was a most naive assumption. Russia and other Eastern European countries may be free from communism but have yet to embrace democracy. In China, it is unclear whether the country's phenomenal economic growth will lead to political democracy. Attempts to implement democracy in countries like Iraq, after having dislodged their dictators, have failed miserably. This forces us to fundamentally reflect on the political order in which we live.²¹ There are also domestic reasons for this reflection. Consider the failure of the Third Way, which had social democratic parties in the West pursuing political modernisation.²² Or the question of how one might implement a renewal of civil society.²³ Or the impact of new media on the behaviour of our politicians, as illusions and sentiments becoming increasingly what matters.²⁴ As a result, less attention is given to the rational or the instrumental and more to the affective or normative dimension of political life. This has also ensured that questions

18 Armstrong 2005, see also 1995.

19 Taylor 2007, 2009.

20 Lenoir 2010, 2013.

21 Fukuyama 2012, 2014.

22 Blond 2010.

23 Alexander 2006.

24 Nussbaum 2013.

about values have once again risen to the top of the public agenda.²⁵ What emerges is the need to develop a new vision of political life as it takes shape in the contemporary world and the changing opportunities that this offers citizen participation.

The last and most recent event to trigger a discussion of moral values is the economic crisis that began in 2008. The outbreak of the crisis is a problem for economists. Although they like to present their field as an exact science, most economists did not see this crisis coming. And what is worse, they also do not know how to solve it. This has to do with the fact that economists work with mathematical models that are detached from social reality.²⁶ Moreover, economists have a narrow view of human nature: they see humans as calculating creatures who pursue their own interests in a rational way. Moral motives do not play a role in the economists' hypothetical economy. It is therefore not surprising that several authors argue for a critical reflection of the assumptions and methodology used in economics. Robert and Edward Skidelsky, for example, argue not only that the current problems arise from a lack of moral values but that the economy itself is part of that problem. Economists concentrate on the means and never allow themselves to elaborate on the ends.²⁷ A related perspective is found in the work of Tomas Sedláček, who believes that scholars need to consider the interconnection between economic and moral motives.²⁸ This theme of the interconnection between economics and moral values also pops up in other disciplines. I am referring to David Graeber's study on debt, which showed how indebtedness in both the monetary and moral sense of the word have been linked with each other for millennia.²⁹ Coen Simon sees the issue from a philosophical perspective in his book entitled *Guilt*.³⁰ In his book *Without Values*, the former banker George Möller critically analyses the functioning of banks.³¹ All these books deal in a penetrating way with the relevance of moral thinking to the economy.

All in all, it is logical that the issue of moral values has become topical precisely in recent years. We see connections occurring between an intellectual reflection on modern life that has been going on for much longer and the political challenges of democratic states that have been struggling

25 Hurenkamp e.a. 2013.

26 See the contributions by De Grauwe and Buiter in: Hemerijck et al. 2009, p. 82-89, 122-123.

27 Skidelsky & Skidelsky 2013.

28 Sedláček 2012.

29 Graeber 2012.

30 Simon 2013.

31 Möller 2012.

for two decades, confronted with the questions brought on by the recent economic crisis. It would go far beyond my intellectual abilities to take this all up, but it certainly plays a role in the background. What this book offers is a philosophical perspective that might shed new light on this matter.

4 Personal motives

The foregoing demonstrates that the question asked in this research stems not only from a scholarly interest in the matter but also from issues and events that have affected public opinion in the Netherlands. Additionally, there are personal reasons for why I have dedicated myself for quite some time to the fate of moral values in modern society. It seems useful at this point to briefly go into this, if only because foreign readers will not be acquainted with me or my work.³²

My longstanding fascination with the tension between morality and modernity is undoubtedly related to my childhood in the 1950s and 1960s in the countryside of North Brabant, an almost entirely Catholic region that had developed into an industrialised society within a relatively short time span. The ambiguity of that change made a big impression on me. This was evident in 1969 when I enrolled as a philosophy student at the University of Nijmegen, where I – along with thousands of my peers – embraced Marxism within weeks. Throughout my entire period of studies and long after, I immersed myself in the work of thinkers who assumed a critical – or at least a distanced – attitude towards modern capitalism. My intellectual heroes were not only the obligatory Marx, Nietzsche and Freud but also thinkers such as Foucault, Lévi-Strauss and other French theorists who drew attention to the drawbacks of modern life. Although their point of view evinced an involvement in ethical issues to some extent, it took some time before I could develop my own, more balanced approach.

That only happened when I began conducting historical research in 1986. My research delved into the modernisation of everyday life observed in the Brabant village of Woensel between 1670 and 1920. This study, for which I

32 Although I have been conducting research into many aspects of modern life, I have published very little in English until now. There are two reasons for this. First, I like to combine theories and ideas from several disciplines, which makes it less attractive to write articles in specialised journals. Personally, I prefer to write books because they give me the opportunity to develop an argument that is more complex. Second, I deliberately address the general public in order to play a role in the public debate. An important disadvantage of this is, of course, that my work is unknown outside the Netherlands.

received a PhD in 1996, taught me that the process of modernisation cannot be reduced to economic forces and conditions, although these clearly had a major impact on the daily lives of those in the village. Political and cultural changes also play a role. I came to the conclusion that the weight of the latter was greater than had been assumed by Marx and many other thinkers on modern society. In fact, I tended to adopt a Hegelian view of history in which the development of society is primarily understood as a spiritual process. In any case, I was able to show that efforts in the fields of education, religion and morality had contributed substantially to the development of modern society in Woensel. All this forced me to dramatically change the theoretical inquiry that I had once started and to give more weight to the question of values, ideas and other spiritual aspects.³³

This has been decisive for the work I have done since 1996. I have researched various aspects of modern life in the Netherlands, ranging from family life to political dissatisfaction and from citizenship to aggressive youngsters. In the process, I realised more and more that the image of the Netherlands as an open society was rather biased. There was indeed a large degree of freedom within Dutch society, but at the same time it imposed exacting expectations (though never fully expressed) of a normative nature. In 2005, my appointment as Professor of Social Administration at the University of Tilburg followed. I was able to continue my theoretical inquiry into modernisation there, although the focus now lay more on political and administrative processes. In the meantime, a substantial turnaround in public opinion was taking place. While before the turn of the millennium an almost naive optimism prevailed in the Netherlands, by 2004 this had transformed into an atmosphere increasingly dominated by cynicism and resentment. Remarkably, it was mainly the 'progressive' intellectuals who relativised moral issues. This prompted me to start a major study in 2008 on the role of religious ideals and spiritual principles in a modern society such as the Netherlands. The present book is the result.

5 Word of thanks

My explanation above is not intended to suggest that I have devised or implemented everything in this book. The insights presented in this volume are the fruits of a collective effort in which thirteen people contributed. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professors Erik Borgman, Paul

33 Van den Brink 1996.

Dekker, Peter Nissen and Willem Witteveen – colleagues with whom I have had a very enjoyable and fruitful cooperation over the past years. My acknowledgement also goes to Hanneke Arts, Wieger Bakker, Loek Halman, Erik van Ingen, Heleen van Luyn, Nicole Maalsté, Heidi de Mare and Karen Woets, each of who took on one (or more) parts of the research. My gratitude also goes to Richard van Zwol and Ellen van Doorne who, as civil servants at the Department of General Affairs, contributed to the financing of the project. I would also like to say a word of thanks to Philip Eijlander who always showed interest in our project – first as dean of the law faculty and later as Rector of the University of Tilburg. Finally, I would like to thank several individuals and agencies who made a second operation of the project possible but who would like to remain anonymous. They prove that altruism still exists in the Netherlands.

Part 1

1 Research questions and theoretical framework

Gabriël van den Brink

Although our research into the meaning of moral sentiments in modern society is largely empirical, we first offer the reader some theoretical considerations. We begin with an explanation of the two concepts that together make up the title of our book. What do we mean by ‘moral sentiments’? And what do we mean by such a generic term as ‘modern society’? We are aware that a proper treatment of these two concepts would never fit into one chapter. Entire libraries could be filled with books dedicated to these subjects, and if one were to consult everything, there would be little time left over for anything else. We have therefore chosen a method that is deliberately selective. For the first concept, we will examine the theory that Adam Smith developed in the middle of the eighteenth century. With regard to the second concept, we make use of the research that we have conducted over the last 30 years and that led in 2007 to our own theory of modernisation. It might be good to forewarn readers that combining these two perspectives does not result in a conceptual synthesis. Ideas about moral sentiments and ideas about modernity are in many ways diametrically opposed. There are no areas where the tension between the two perspectives are definitively resolved, and this is precisely the crux of our research. To make this plausible, a more historically oriented consideration is required, which is presented in chapter 2. This, of course, does not relieve us of the duty to develop a consistent line of thought here.

This line of thought is structured in the following manner. We begin with a summary of Adam Smith’s analysis of moral sentiments (section 1). We then explain how he sees the relationship between morality and other facets of social life (section 2). This brings us to the question of how these ideas can be reconciled with certain insights about the modern economy. Smith is famous largely because he was the first to understand the laws of the free market, an insight that established economics as a scientific discipline (section 3). In the section that follows, we expand on our second concept, modern society. We explain what we mean by modernisation (section 4). Then we discuss three features that we believe form the core of modern life (section 5). As an extension of this point, we describe a few trends that interact with one another during the modernisation process but

that cannot be brought together under one category: namely the pursuit of rationality, democracy and economies of scale. These trends were crucial to the ideas of Weber, Tocqueville and Marx (section 6). We illustrate how these processes continue to this day and how they are more advanced in one part of Europe than in the other (section 7). The first seven sections of this chapter acquaint the reader with the two elements mentioned in the title of our book: modernity and morality. A crucial point, however, is how one sees the relationship between these elements. We believe this relationship is often incongruent (section 8), resulting in widely differing effects when they interact in social reality (section 9). The aim of our empirical research is to determine what effects actually occur in a modern society such as the Netherlands. We conclude with a short outline of the book and an explanation of how our research project came about (section 10).

1 The theory of moral sentiments

As an intellectual figure, the moral philosopher Adam Smith (1723-1790) hardly requires an introduction. He was a representative of the Scottish Enlightenment and became famous throughout the world with his book *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. This book – usually referred to as simply *The Wealth of Nations* – marks the beginning of the modern economy and is quoted with great respect to this day. What is less well known is that, 17 years prior to the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith published a book entitled *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. We use this book as a starting point because, as we shall prove later, it is remarkably consistent with a number of discoveries made over the last 30 years.¹

1 We refer specifically to recent insights from the field of biology. Research on the behaviour of primates and other animals that live in groups has shown that although they have conflicts, they are also able to settle their differences and to bring about a reconciliation. This ability is considered to be the natural basis for human morality (De Waal 1996, p. 20-36, 42-78; Aureli & De Waal 2000, p. 3-8, 15-30, 307-308). The cognitive conditions for reconciliation are fairly simple, and thus such behaviour has been observed in several animal species, but especially among mammals and birds (Aureli & De Waal 2000, p. 24). These findings are consistent with Smith's thoughts on human morality. He considers moral sentiments a natural thing, which develop in the framework of a society but mostly manifest themselves in relationships between individual people. In one of his recent books, Frans de Waal stresses this relationship between Adam Smith's work and modern biology (De Waal 2009, p. 11). We will return to this theme in the next chapter (chapter 2, section 1).

What does this theory boil down to?² To begin with, Smith believes that human morality is primarily a matter of feelings. He begins his book with the statement that every person has certain principles that lead him/her to be interested in the fate of others. Smith was alluding in particular to a sentiment he describes as pity, compassion or sympathy – what nowadays would be called empathy.³ This feeling is aroused in us when we see that others are suffering from pain or sorrow or when we can vividly imagine this pain or sorrow. Not only virtuous people but even the most hardened criminals are able to do this. This feeling is aroused in us when we are able to identify with another person and when we have some idea of the trials s/he must have endured.⁴ We then experience, albeit in a weakened form, the same emotion. Incidentally, it is not so much the pain or sorrow that moves us but rather the circumstances that evoke these emotions. We imagine how terrible it must be to have been betrayed by a friend or to be convicted even when one is clearly innocent.⁵ It makes little difference whether our emotions are evoked by a situation that exists in reality or by a situation that we are only imagining. Even the fate of the main character in a tragedy or novel can conjure up intense feelings.⁶ In our minds, we travel to the story's setting and experience in our imagination all the characters' adventures.⁷

2 In our research on moral sentiments, we benefited greatly from the thesis written by Edith Burgmans in 1989 on the philosophy of Adam Smith (Brugmans 1989). However, the discussions that follow rest on our own reading of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. We use the final edition – which was edited by Smith himself – from 1790. For the sake of brevity, we will hereafter refer to this work as TMS.

3 The theme of empathy has become very popular in recent years. In TV programmes and in social media, sharing feelings plays an important role. Yet morality requires more than just compassion; one must also form an opinion on shared sentiments (Brugmans 1989, p. 11-23).

4 TMS, p. 4-5.

5 TMS, p. 7, 24-25.

6 Although the eighteenth century is often considered the Age of Reason, Smith's work (and those of other thinkers from the Scottish Enlightenment such as Hume or Hutcheson) demonstrates that another sensitivity began to emerge. For example, Smith refers to a novel by Samuel Richardson published in 1740 and received enthusiastically by the public. Smith analyses the way in which the reader sympathises with everything that happens to the main character (Brugmans 1989, p. 32). We see here a resemblance with the St Matthew Passion by Johann Sebastian Bach from 1728. The power of this piece comes from its ability to spur the audience to suffer along with the protagonist. This is felt to this day, as shown in the mass participation in performances of the St Matthew Passion in the Netherlands. All this forces us to revise our image of the eighteenth century as a 'rational' age. It was in any case also an age in which a new sensitivity emerged. An alternative interpretation of the Enlightenment can be found in Veenbaas 2013.

7 TMS, p. 5-6, 29, 66. This book discusses at various points the importance of imagination for people living together in a society. Worth mentioning here is the way in which Benedict

These processes also occur in everyday life. They even largely determine the way people treat each other. If the other person cannot in any way sympathise with the misfortune I have been struck with, if s/he is not outraged by the wrongs inflicted on me, then it is as though we are living in completely separate universes. According to Smith, however, this is seldom the case. In reality, we are constantly putting ourselves in other peoples' shoes and asking ourselves what they must be feeling. Moreover, we assume that others are doing the same with us. The intensity of this mutual sympathy increases the more closely we are connected to the other person. We expect more compassion from a friend or acquaintance than from a stranger, and we assume that the same is true for them.⁸ But this does not alter the fact that the game of mutual mirroring is taking place in the entire society and that people are constantly evaluating each other.⁹ They repeatedly make clear the extent to which they approve or disapprove of our actions. In this sense, moral sentiments are banal: they are part of ordinary social interactions and relate to tangible events or behaviours.¹⁰

But what standards are used in this mutual assessment? What makes us interpret another person's behaviour as laudable or without merit? According to Smith, we consider a deed laudable if it gives rise to feelings of gratitude, and we consider a deed blameworthy if it gives rise to feelings of revenge. Although objective criteria do not exist, this does not mean that they are arbitrary. It turns out that people's feelings about behaviour are remarkably consistent. To be laudable, a deed must elicit a sense of gratitude in most people. There must be a certain consensus that this deed

Anderson understands the idea of national community (chapter 2, section 6), the role of ideals in politics (chapter 11, section 9) and the way in which the problems of human society are treated in widely accessible cultural expressions (chapter 8).

8 TMS, p. 16-18.

9 TMS, p. 100. Incidentally, this observation by Smith is also confirmed in modern biology. We return to this topic in our discussion of so-called mirror neurons (chapter 2, section 1).

10 Smith criticises philosophers who utilise general ideas when dealing with ethical issues. According to him, proper behaviour can only be determined on the basis of concrete cases. It is only through examples that we can establish whether or not our feelings correspond with those of others (TMS, p. 168). This is precisely why Smith's thinking is so relevant for modern society. The research that we have conducted in recent years on how professionals operate has taught us that their moral action depends to a large extent on the social situation. Their actions are determined not by ethical principles, philosophical ideas or political beliefs but rather by the specific context in which they work, the individual people they deal with and the concrete questions to which they must find an answer (Van den Brink 2010b, Van den Brink e.a. 2012c, Jansen e.a. 2012, Karsten 2013). In other words, the classical problem of 'foundation' does not play any role in practice. It is by interacting with people that morality manifests itself (see also Brugmans 1989, p. 138-139, 143; Fleisschhacker 2013, p. 9).

will lead to thankful feelings in the hearts of every person. The same holds for blameworthy behaviour, except that the consensus in this case is that the behaviour deserves to be punished.¹¹ On the question of whether we pay attention to the motives or the consequences of that deed, Smith is clear that our feelings of gratitude or ingratitude only relate to the intentions of the person carrying out the deed. We can sympathise with someone who is treated badly by another person, but we condemn this treatment if it is based on malicious intent. If the same treatment was the result of an unfortunate coincidence or ignorance, then our censure is less severe. The same applies, of course, to benevolent acts.¹² In this regard, it appears that Smith would have been a convinced adherent of what later came to be known as *Gesinnungsethik*.¹³

Although the approval or disapproval of our fellow human beings is important, a subsequent step is required for a moral judgement. More important than being praised by others, people want to know: 1) if they actually deserve the praise, and 2) just how praiseworthy they are.¹⁴ They need a more objective standard than the consensus of that moment. To add this objectivity, Smith introduces a new entity that he describes as the 'impartial spectator'. The idea is that I identify myself with the position of a third person, and from that position I assess my behaviour towards other people. The crucial question is whether, in the eyes of the impartial spectator, my behaviour deserves commendation or disapproval. Smith gives this inner entity several names such as reason, conscience, the inner man, the 'inhabitant of our breast', the great judge or the supreme assessor of our conduct.¹⁵ He is talking here about what we nowadays refer to as our conscience: an inner entity that knows not only our actions but also our

¹¹ TMS, p. 59-61.

¹² TMS, p. 65-66, 70, 83, 86.

¹³ At the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Weber made a distinction between two kinds of ethics. '*Gesinnungsethik*' leads one to ask what the intention of a particular action is, while '*Verantwortungsethik*' is concerned mainly with the consequences of that action (Weber 2012, p. 88-106). In modern society, the preference is often for the second sort, i.e. one wants to know whether an action has the desired effects. In recent decades, the need for 'accountability' has increased significantly, especially when dealing with officials in the civil service. We not only want to know if they have achieved results but also if they have gone about their jobs in an efficient manner. After all, good intentions get us nowhere. Although this preference for efficiency is understandable, we are not doing justice to human morality in this manner. In our personal contacts, it is precisely good intentions that are of paramount importance. In this way, Adam Smith's theory of moral sentiments contains a welcome correction to the way of thinking that now prevails (cf. Fleischhacker 2013, p. 3 en 9).

¹⁴ TMS, p. 102-103, 105.

¹⁵ TMS, p. 75, 99-103, 119-121.

emotions, that teaches us to take into account other peoples' interest and that urges us to pass judgement righteously.¹⁶ Incidentally, Smith repeats here his statement about the capacity for sympathy – that this impartial spectator is not only operative for very virtuous people. Precisely because it is in most people's nature to be capable of making moral judgements, the most important question is what type of conduct is seen by everyone to be commendable. Inherently, the voice of the conscience tends to be in agreement with what all people consider proper.¹⁷

Nonetheless, it may be necessary for the 'impartial spectator' in ourselves to be awakened by someone else pointing out certain flaws or deficiencies in us. We all have a natural tendency to depict our actions and intentions in a more favourable light than they actually are. In that case, the critical judgement of others is helpful. Being surrounded by friendly, indulgent or biased people can easily lull our moral judgement to sleep. In that sense, the presence of a truly unbiased outsider can help us. But the core of the mechanism described here is imaginary in nature: we imagine how 'everyone' would judge our actions and intentions and decide on that basis what to do.¹⁸

16 TMS, p. 115-116, 118, 239-240. After discussing the many ways in which various authors have interpreted the idea of the 'impartial spectator', Brugmans concludes that our morality is essentially a form of sympathy. 'Sympathy springs forth from another person's situation. This is why morality is *originally* intersubjective. Sympathy is feeling for someone by putting oneself in the situation of the other. To be touched by another person's situation triggers sympathetic feelings. If the sympathetic feelings of the spectator correspond with the initial sentiments of the person directly involved, the sentiments and actions of those involved will be considered appropriate and will be approved (...). The criterion of appropriateness and of moral approval is when the sympathetic feelings of the spectator and the initial feelings of the person directly involved are in agreement. The standard of appropriateness is sympathy. The precise and distinct standard of appropriateness is the sympathy of the impartial spectator, the spectator who judges purely and solely on the basis of their sympathetic relationship with the person directly involved and not (partly) on the basis of a particular relationship to the one involved (...). The moral interest is thus not only originally but also *quintessentially* intersubjective. This insight into the nature and origin of morality is *absent* from ethical utilitarianism...' (Brugmans 1989, p. 138-139)

17 TMS, p. 121.

18 TMS, p. 128-129, 135-136. Today, the media in particular plays an important role. It likes to see itself as the 'fresh pair of eyes' that reminds public people or organisations of certain moral values. This can certainly help: both people and organisations adjust their behaviour once the media denounces that behaviour as improper. A cynical explanation for this is that public organisations or people are out to protect their reputation. Yet we cannot exclude the possibility that good intentions are also at work here. Whether the media itself always acts morally is a completely different matter...

These are the main elements on which Adam Smith bases his book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The book discusses feelings that: a) come from our natural capacity for pity or compassion; b) play a crucial role in the daily interaction between people, and c) are endowed with a moral standard via the conscience. Thus Smith considers the occurrence of moral sentiments as a natural phenomenon and not something that stems from a religious tradition, a philosophical thought or a political conviction. It became an inevitable fact from the moment humans came together to form a society. This does not mean, however, that moral sentiments always play the same role or that their function is the same in every domain of life. It is therefore useful to examine in more detail the relationship between moral sentiments and several social domains.

2 Morality and society

How does Adam Smith view rules of etiquette? He acknowledges that there are general rules that play an important role in everyday life. They came into being because we judge ourselves and others numerous times, which leads inductively to the acceptance of general guidelines whose practical utility is not in question. Indeed, even those who follow these rules out of a sense of duty or out of habit are acting in a morally correct manner.¹⁹

The fact remains that the validity of such rules is a derivative: following them is correct because they match our moral sentiments and not because the general rule in itself is correct. Smith is thus critical of those who portray such rules as divine commandments.²⁰ He also takes issue with those who rely on general rules to evaluate specific situations. For both everyday life and in the case of a novel or history, applying general rules is rarely helpful. We can only express moral judgements when we let the specifics of the situation sink in and ask ourselves what sentiments they might give rise to.²¹ Smith took even greater objection to philosophers who developed a moral system based on such rules. They mistakenly believe that judgements about what is right and what is wrong work in the same way that a court does, where existing laws are applied to a specific case or an individual action.²²

19 TMS, p. 140, 143-144, 152.

20 TMS, p. 145, 151-152.

21 TMS, p. 141, 148, 157-158.

22 TMS, p. 141. The tendency to guide the actions of professionals through protocols and rules has increased significantly in Europe in the last twenty years. This tendency is related to the growing influence of Anglo-Saxon thinking in the political and economic realms. This comes at

Smith denies that it would be possible to capture in language all the nuances that play a role in our moral sentiments, let alone the possibility of drawing up precise rules. In thinking about moral questions, it is far more sensible to work with real-life examples that trigger our natural reflexes and in this way determine whether a particular act is morally right or wrong.²³

There is, however, one domain where Smith makes an exception, and that is the rule of law. When it comes to social virtues, we must always be guided by the specifics of the situation or person and by the question of whether they evoke feelings of approval or gratitude. If someone is treated generously and does nothing in return, the most that one can do is reproach that person. Gratitude, after all, cannot be enforced.²⁴ But the situation is different when the law has been violated. According to Smith, everyone has the right to protect himself against the harm inflicted upon him. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is a fundamental law of nature. Acting unjustly engenders outrage in everyone, and punishing the perpetrator is accepted by everyone. This is why the state – which guards justice with the help of legal regulations – may coercively impose its laws.²⁵ Without the rule of law, there would be no society. After all, the minimum requirement for societal interaction is that citizens do not inflict harm on one another.²⁶ Those who prioritise their own interest so much that they affect the happiness of their fellow human beings must deal with the government. Smith goes quite far in his defence of the public interest over individual interest. He believes that, when it comes down to it, our compassion for individual people must make way for compassion for humanity as a whole.²⁷ Thus Smith considers the law a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for morality. One cannot find fault with citizens who follow the law, but to be morally commendable, more is needed. To clarify this relationship, Smith uses the distinction between grammar and style. Grammatical rules are fixed and are the same for everyone: violating these rules inevitably leads to a mistake. The rules of rhetoric, however, allow far more freedom and lead to a discourse that

the expense of the Rhineland model, which uses principles instead of rules and where sharing experiences is more important than delivering individual achievements. Ironically, Adam Smith's thinking is more in line with the Rhineland model. (TMS, p. 300; see also Fleischhacker 2013, p., 5)

23 TMS, p. 300-301, 304, 311-312; see also Fleischhacker 2013, 1-2, 8.

24 TMS, p. 71-73, 155-156.

25 TMS, p. 72-74, 312-313.

26 If there was a society of robbers and murderers, they must at least manage to refrain from robbing and killing each other, according to Adam Smith. Benevolence is less essential for the preservation of society than justice. Without justice, no society could exist. (TMS, 77-78).

27 TMS, p. 73, 80-82, 197, 205.

can be either less or more elegant. In the same way, all citizens must abide by the law, but their moral merits depend on the question of how they deal with their fellow human beings in social interactions.²⁸

Of course, law and morality are not the only forces that drive our coexistence. Smith elaborates on the ‘selfish passions’ that are characteristic of entrepreneurs and those who wield power. We tend to have little appreciation for people who show no ambition in safeguarding their interests. This applies to the monarch who is not prepared to defend his country, to the member of parliament in an election campaign who shows insufficient commitment and for the entrepreneur who doesn’t try his best.²⁹ Although striving for a higher position hinges on vanity, it does bring significant advantages with it. People simply like to be seen, admired and appreciated by others. Once again, the ability to sympathise plays a role. The affluent delight in the knowledge that fellow citizens look up to them in admiration. They gladly surrender to public display, knowing that many of the poor vicariously identify with them. The opposite tends to hold for the poor – they are prone to hide their misery. No evil is more difficult to endure than the scorn one receives from one’s fellow citizens. Thus Smith argues that human sympathy is far from symmetrical. According to him, the wish to sympathise is more focused on the upper class than on the lower class. People sympathise more with the rich and powerful than with those who are powerless and poor.³⁰ This in itself does not give rise to a moral (dis)qualification. It is just one of the ways in which we seek admiration and social respect. One can also attain that respect by practising virtue and wisdom. At the same time, Smith holds that our natural admiration for the rich and powerful of this planet is a threat to our moral sensitivity. In the middle class, social success and a virtuous way of life often go hand in hand. For the upper classes, this is unfortunately much less the case: they succumb more often to lawlessness and deceit.³¹ In other words, although societal ambitions and moral sentiments are in theory two separate matters,

28 TMS, p. 73, 157, 300.

29 TMS, p. 154-155.

30 TMS, p. 39, 44-47, 51-54. Incidentally, a marked difference may exist between the eighteenth century and now in this regard. While elites were an important example in Smith’s time, this appears to be much less the case in our democratic society.

31 Smith’s moral judgement of the social elite is quite harsh. He notes that members of the upper class often consider themselves to be above the law. They do not hesitate to use deception in order to reach their goals, and they sometimes commit the worst crimes to eliminate those who get in their way (TMS, p. 56-57).

in reality the vanity of those ambitions is often accompanied by a degradation of morality.

Given the reputation that Adam Smith has as an advocate of individual interests, there can be no harm in reflecting on what he has to say about this in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. According to Smith, each one of us has the obligation to look after ourselves. We are able to do this because we know ourselves, our feelings and our situation as no other. Moreover, nature has created us so that we have more interest in what concerns us than in the well-being of other people. People are also more inclined to care for their own family members and for others with whom they are connected in some way.³² In fact, one's own interest serves as the motor of social activity. One could even say that in this way the public interest is served. While the rich indisputably pursue their gains, they unwittingly help to improve the overall level of prosperity. It is as if they are being led by an invisible hand. In the same way, the actions of those in power can have a beneficial outcome. It is often not out of benevolence but out of vanity that they fulfill public functions, but the unintended result can be that they serve the public interest.³³ All this is fully consistent with Smith's considerations mentioned above: the pursuit of one's own interest is a natural phenomenon which does not have to be at odds with a moral way of life. But the pursuit of power and wealth must take place within certain limits. Those who beat their rivals in an unfair manner should expect an indignant response from the public.³⁴ When we see that justice and truth are being violated by economic activity, this evokes a strong reaction in all people. Our compassion then spontaneously goes out to the victims, while the successful winner is condemned.³⁵ While economic and political success are necessary, they tell us nothing about morality. Smith believes that a society without moral sentiments could exist. It is not a problem per se if the members of a society limit themselves to the business exchange of goods and services. At the same time, Smith believes that a society in

32 TMS, p. 73, 198, 202-203.

33 TMS, p. 164-166.

34 TMS, p. 75, 192-193.

35 TMS, p. 150, 163-164. It is unlikely that the appreciation for justice and truth above economic gain is still shared as commonly as Adam Smith presumes. Some think so. Tom Tyler, for example, believes that many citizens accept the outcome of legal proceedings when such proceedings are marked by truth and justice – even when the result is disappointing for the citizens themselves. (Tyler 1990; Tyler & Huo 2002). Others believe that citizens want to see their own preferences honoured. In this book, we show that in many areas of human life there is a mix of self-interest and moral values. We return to this theme in chapter 9, section 8.

which mutual gratitude and love flourish is far preferable to that of a purely business-like society. For good reason, he argues that we admire people who are able to master their selfish passions and are sensitive to the fate of others.³⁶ According to him, a wise and virtuous man is always prepared to sacrifice his own interest for the public good.³⁷

And finally, there is the question of how our moral sentiments depend on matters that Smith labels as ‘fashion’ or ‘habit’— what we nowadays would describe as ‘culture’. Although the human imagination has a significant influence on culture, Smith is not convinced that moral approval or disapproval depends on the culture one is born into. He does ascertain a degree of variation from culture to culture. In barbaric countries, people seem more willing to sacrifice themselves for the community, while civilised countries ensure that individual interests are given more space.³⁸ But essentially, human nature gives rise to the same moral sentiments.³⁹ According to Samuel Fleischhacker, we are confronted here with a view often expressed in the enlightened eighteenth century, one that underestimated the influence of social or cultural factors on moral ideas.⁴⁰ Consequently, Smith blithely proceeds on the basis of sentiments or expectations that were normal in his time. This is also reflected in his ideas about the impartial spectator, which rest on standards that are accepted by ‘everyone’ within a given community.⁴¹ We now know that these standards depend heavily on the cultural context and that the judgement of an impartial spectator could turn out to be very different depending on whether one was in Denmark, China or Nigeria. Having said that, the circle of people and cultures that we

36 TMS, p. 77, 134.

37 TMS, p. 213. However, the question is where and how the public good is served. In the twentieth century, this occurred at the level of the nation-state and via government policy or national politics. In the last twenty years, this is increasingly occurring at the local level, with the initiative coming from social actors (see chapter 9, section 7-9).

38 This observation appears to be correct. The chances for individual development are the greatest in prosperous and modern countries, while in less developed countries there is more emphasis on collective interests (chapter 6, section 2).

39 TMS, p. 174, 180, 184, 188-189. An illustration of this view is found in Paul Ekman's research into facial expressions. He discovered that there is an automatic relationship between facial features and human emotions. It is for this reason that expressions of anger, joy or disgust are recognised in all cultures. In this sense, people have in common with each other the core of their moral feelings. At the same time, the culture determines to what extent these feelings are expressed, and in that sense, cultural variation is equally important (Ekman 2003, p. 18-21, 28-35, 41-42, 70-72).

40 Much research has since been conducted on the extent to which cultures differ from (or are similar to) each other on this point. An overview can be found in Fry 2000, p. 335-351.

41 Fleischhacker 2011, p. 23-24, 26-28.

interact with is becoming ever wider due to globalisation. If the impartial spectator's purpose is indeed to ask what all other people think of our behaviour, then we must expand this circle of people, as Amartya Sen has emphasised. We must place ourselves mentally in Denmark, China or Nigeria and ask ourselves what people from those cultural backgrounds would say about our behaviour.⁴² This leads to a broader conception of law and morality than was common in the era of Adam Smith, but this broader conception would still fit into the theoretical framework that he unfolds in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁴³

3 Will the real Adam Smith please stand up?

There may be readers who are surprised by what we have said so far about Adam Smith. Such readers know him as the author of his famous work *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776 and often presented as the beginning of the science of economics. In this book, Smith explains that in a commercial society, people operate in their own interest and that the public interest is served if the market can be allowed to do its work. This raises questions about Smith's intellectual consistency. How does *The Wealth of Nations* relate to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*? This question has at least four possible answers. One answer is that the books contradict each other. What Smith argues in one text is negated in the other. Although much has already been written about this problem, we prefer to set it aside. Those who accuse great thinkers of a lack of consistency rarely grasp the stature of such thinkers. It is better to recognise that Smith has left us with an ambiguous legacy with these two books and that working out this ambiguity is an intellectual challenge.⁴⁴

42 Sen 2009, p. 125-126, 129-130, 151.

43 See, for example, the famous passage in which Smith asks how a civilised person would react to the news that an earthquake in faraway China has taken the lives of millions of fellow human beings. Smith suspects that that person would not have trouble sleeping at night. But if this same person knew that the following day he would lose his pinky, then he would not be able to sleep a wink (TMS, p. 119-120). It is quite remarkable that Adam Smith – writing in the middle of the eighteenth century when the distance between Europe and China was still unimaginably great – considered the possibility of global engagement.

44 Sedlacek 2012, p. 231-232. An entire bookshelf can be filled with publications on the issue of the two Smiths. Schumpeter already spoke of 'the Adam Smith Problem'. What is certain is that the father of the science of economics has saddled this scientific discipline with an ambiguous view, according to Sedlacek (2012, p. 239).

This brings us to the second way in which the linkage between *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations* can be understood. Many people see the latter book as Smith's decisive contribution to academic thinking while ascribing less importance to the other book. It is mostly economists who subscribe to such an interpretation. Smith is on record as the father of their discipline, the first man to scientifically explain the functioning of markets and the first also to oppose undue interference by the government.⁴⁵ Not without reason, every economic handbook refers to the famous passage in which Smith explains how the butcher, the brewer and the baker do not do their work out of benevolence but because they have their own interest in mind. The idea of the individual who rationally pursues his own interest is just as fundamental to the modern economy as Newton's discovery is for physics. Given the fecundity of this discovery, Smith's thoughts on moral sentiments are a side issue, some would say.⁴⁶

The third interpretation rests on the reversal of this view. According to this view, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is Smith's most comprehensive work, while *The Wealth of Nations* is about a more specific subject. The latter work explains how a market functions in theory, but nowhere does Smith declare that market forces are the principal element of society. In reality, markets are just one part of the society as a whole. An active policy is thus needed to ensure that market mechanisms develop. Moreover, each market brings with it certain risks that can only be supplemented or corrected by political institutions. No one is doomed to think only of one's self-interest, and in reality this rarely occurs. This is why Smith's work on

45 By assuming that human behaviour is based not on morality but on the pursuit of one's self-interest, economics was able to consider itself the 'most exact' science. However, many began to question this pretention due to the crisis that began in 2008, the disastrous consequences of which we are still feeling to this day (Sen 2010, p. 51). The difficulty is not limited to the fact that many economists did not see this crisis coming. The more important point is that their discipline is itself part of the problem. This was the conclusion of a publication by the WRR (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor Regeringsbeleid) on the causes and consequences of the crisis. The authors of this publication point out that the crisis brought to light several significant flaws in economics as a scientific discipline. They mention two axioms that in their opinion are being called into question. The first one is the assumption that people operate in a rational manner when making economic decisions and that they have access to enough information to do so. Both history and the way in which the crisis has progressed have shown us that there are irrational forces at work and that people often have a poor understanding of what is happening to them. The second assumption is that markets are a self-regulating system and that government regulation would only be disruptive (De Grauwe 2009, p. 82-84; Buiters 2009, p. 123; Hemerijck 2009, p. 32-35; see also Sen 2010, p. 54).

46 Sen 2010, p. 50-51, 54-55; Berry 2009, p. 4; Skidelsky & Skidelsky 2013, p. 74-75, 77-78.

moral sentiments has more importance than many economists are willing to admit.⁴⁷

A final interpretation points out that both books are similar in that Smith follows a similar approach to both moral and economic issues. He resists the philosophical practice of explaining human behaviour on the basis of a single principle.⁴⁸ He believes people are subject to at least two tendencies. We are by nature inclined to look after ourselves, but as social beings we are also susceptible to the tendency to look after each other – a tendency that is just as much in our nature as looking after ourselves. In our everyday lives, we are confronted with both economic and moral considerations. It is therefore not surprising that Smith uses the same method for both books. Hence his starting premise in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is our everyday judgements about good and evil. He gives more weight to the practical lessons of life than the models devised by moralists and philosophers. He does the same in *The Wealth of Nations*, where he deems the practical decisions of merchants to be more relevant than the models of politicians or governments.⁴⁹ And finally, Smith believes that people who follow their natural tendencies in everyday life are thereby inadvertently promoting the general welfare. This is the idea of the ‘invisible hand’, a concept that is developed in *The Wealth of Nations* but first pops up in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.⁵⁰

All in all, one does great injustice to Adam Smith if one sees him as a propagandist of egocentrism. He articulates a strong moral vision of human society, although he is realistic enough to know that there will always be a mix of selfish and social aspirations. He maintained this vision until the final and revised edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* published in 1790. This was the year in which Smith died and came fourteen years after

47 Sen 2010, p. 52-53, 56; Berry 2009, p. 2; Fleischhacker 2013, p. 9, 14. There are authors who believe that it was precisely the economy's value-free approach that contributed to the onset of the current crisis. Robert and Edward Skidelsky argue that our current economic problems stem from a moral crisis. The banking crisis not only demonstrates the vulnerability of our financial system, it also proves that modern capitalism leads to the embracing of classical vices such as envy, greed and excess (Skidelsky & Skidelsky 2013, p. 13, 16-17, 100-101). This is by no means a coincidence – it is directly related to the nature of economics as a scientific discipline. Most economists operate as value-free scientists: they refrain from expressing opinions about social ideals, political goals or moral principles and limit themselves to the problem of resources (Skidelsky & Skidelsky 2013, p. 26, 124-128).

48 Fleischhacker 2011, p. 3; Sedlacek 2012, p. 232-233.

49 Fleischhacker 2011, p. 23-24.

50 TMS, p. 165; Berry 2009, p. 4.

the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*.⁵¹ It would thus be very one-sided to see him only as an economist and to consider his thoughts on morality to be of only secondary importance.⁵²

4 On modernity and modernisation

Now that we have examined the first theme from the title of our book ('moral sentiments'), we would like to throw some light on the second theme. What do we mean by the term 'modern society'? What meanings can be linked to terms such as 'modernity' or 'modernisation'? We first discuss some meanings that in our view are less appropriate before indicating just what we mean by the term modern.⁵³

To begin with, we rule out a strictly *chronological* meaning. It is true that modernity has always had a temporal connotation. The Latin word 'modernus' refers to a present that distinguishes itself from the past. In later centuries as well, the term expressed the realisation that a separation exists between present and past.⁵⁴ And yet it would be incorrect to put modernity on a par with 'the latest developments' or 'the present'. This would be equating the term with the word contemporary, making it impossible to distinguish between less or more modern developments. Second, a *geographical* meaning is also inadequate. While it cannot be denied that the process of modernisation began in the West and developed fully there, we cannot restrict modernity to the West alone. Forms of modernisation are taking place beyond the West as well. There are even countries that are modernising and at the same time resisting the hegemony of the West.⁵⁵

51 Berry 2009, p. 2; Sedlacek 2012, p. 231-232.

52 See the book by Tomas Sedlacek that thrust him into the debate. He objects to the idea that economics is a value-free science. A look at the history of economic thinking shows that stories about good and evil have continually played a role. It would be better if economics made its many – mostly implicit – values, images and metaphors explicit (Sedlacek 2012, p. 16-20). We must not view the work of Adam Smith as the beginning of a new development but as the zenith of an old tradition that reflected on the interdependence of economic and moral motives. The economists after Smith abandoned this interdependence, with the result that their reasoning lacks any semblance of normativity (Sedlacek 2012, p. 250, 367-372).

53 The two following sections are in large measure consistent with Van den Brink 2007a, p. 22-30. We have, however, introduced a change from the Dutch edition: we now characterise modernity with the help of three (instead of four) fault lines.

54 Valade 2001, p. 9940.

55 Eisenstadt 2000, p. 23; see also Buruma & Margalit 2004, p. 3-7, 39-40, 91-105; Roy 2003, p. 15-18, 40-62.

This illustrates that we cannot equate modernisation with Westernisation. Third, we should not see modernisation solely as a matter of *innovation* or the introduction of new techniques. The spread of new insights obviously plays a major role, but what is also at stake in modernisation are social, political and cultural processes. These often have their own dynamic and depend only partially on technical innovations. And fourth, modernisation cannot be seen as a deliberate *strategy*. A strategy requires a centre of power determining certain objectives, the deployment of resources in a rational manner, and the weighing of the costs and benefits, etc. This kind of strategic rationality seldom occurs in the process of modernisation. The process usually stems from decisions that millions of people take, which makes deliberate coordination virtually impossible.

What is then characteristic of the process of modernisation? We start with several formal characteristics and then identify the substance of this process. One important point is that *gradual changes* usually occur. Modernisation does not relate to one single event but rather many small shifts. The change occurs so gradually that the people concerned often do not even notice it happening. The contrasts only become evident when one compares the situations over a period of two or three generations. Another point is that modernisation always has a certain *tendency* or *direction*. Although the reactions to such trends are often varied, everyone realises that the whole is moving in one particular direction. Incidentally, this does not mean that those involved cannot do anything about this direction. They can make a course correction as long as they take into account the dominant trends. In addition, modernisation processes are *always complex* in the sense that there are different trends interacting with each other. The process takes a different form depending on the domain. For example, the modernisation of family life is different from the modernisation of a company. Tension may arise between the modernisation of education and modernisation in the political field. As a matter of fact, the direction of these processes as well as the way in which they influence the movement as a whole must be determined anew each time. Finally, most effects of modernisation are *ambivalent in nature*. What one group calls progress is seen by another group as a loss. Partly because of this, modernisation often spawns diametrically opposed reactions, with optimistic and pessimistic interpretations alternating with each other.⁵⁶

56 Our insights into the process of modernisation have been shaped not so much by the philosophical debates on modernity or postmodernity but above all by empirical research into the way in which the modernisation process took place in the period 1670-1920. The results of this research can be found in Van den Brink 1996a.

5 Three fault lines

We have yet to explore the phenomenon of modernisation. This has been determined mainly by the upheavals that West Europe has experienced since the Middle Ages. We are referring to the three ‘revolutions’ that took place at different stages in history and that have all had a significant influence on the development of a modern society.

The first we would mention is the *scientific revolution*. This term refers to the period in which major discoveries were made and a new worldview began to develop. Although for a long time it was believed that these discoveries were the result of the individual achievement of men such as Copernicus or Newton, historical research has shown that this was a collective process in which the social circumstances of the time played a major role.⁵⁷ Moreover, most of the discoverers were very practical. They experimented with new techniques, inventions and devices in order to serve their patrons. Because they travelled frequently back and forth between cities and royal courts, their findings were able to spread quickly. The invention of the printing press also contributed to this rapid spread of ideas. This meant that knowledge could not only be recorded in texts, tableaux and drawings but also that it could be spread on an unprecedented scale. An accumulation of practical knowledge came into being that was initially combined with classical thinking but eventually broke out of the framework of ancient philosophy.⁵⁸ Thus began an irreversible process of theoretical and technical innovation that received an ideological connotation in the course of the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment in particular saw this innovation as a triumph of the scientific method over the irrationality of faith – a view that to this day has its supporters but does not tally with the way in which the scientific revolution actually took place.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, religious faith went through an equally momentous change. Here also, there was more at play than just the actions of individual reformers such as Luther or Calvin. Changes had been taking place for some time in northwest Europe in the field of spirituality and theology. Under the influence of movements such as the *Devotio Moderna* (Modern Devotion) and humanism, the position of laypeople was strengthened while priests increasingly came to be seen as an unnecessary element. More emphasis was placed on a personal relationship

57 Shapin 1994, p. 42-125; 1996, p. 119-165.

58 De Mare 2012, p. 75-94.

59 Damerow & Renn 2001, p. 13749-13751.

with God.⁶⁰ And it was once again the printing press that ensured that these new ideas spread rapidly. The work of Luther and other reformers were printed and read on a large scale. In this way, not only the intellectual elite but also the lower nobility, the bourgeoisie and the peasantry came into contact with these new ideas. The success of the Reformation was in large measure determined by socio-political factors. It was a particular success in areas where the new faith was mobilised for the formation (or consolidation) of nation-states. In other areas, the religious struggle was settled in favour of Catholicism. This made little difference to religious life, since the Catholic side also proceeded to implement reforms. In the seventeenth century, processes were set in motion on the part of both Catholics and Protestants that can be classified as a kind of rationalisation, leading to a more explicit profession of one's faith, stricter moral rules and more supervision of the faithful.⁶¹ An upheaval took place that has rightly been called a moral revolution, one that did not go against the scientific rationality of that time but that underwent an analogous development.

While the first revolution affected primarily the level of moral and intellectual processes, the second concerned the political level. Moreover, this transformation took place more than a century later. We are referring, of course, to the *American and French Revolutions* at the end of the eighteenth century, which represented a break with regimes in which the masses had no say.⁶² Power was in the hands of a privileged elite who could rule at their own discretion over those who lived in their territory. The population was only the object and never the subject of political activity.⁶³ The revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century

60 The main inspiration for the *Devotio Moderna* was the Dutch priest Geert Grote. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, he started a movement that opposed practices such as concubinage by priests and monks owning worldly goods. His focus was on following Christ, who Grote believed was the preeminent figure through whom God revealed himself to mankind. His life should be an example for human society. Grote's followers put this idea into practice by living together as laymen and priests in one house. These 'brothers of the common life' did not behave as monks. They usually lived in an urban setting and wanted to form a Christian community. Their main activity was to write and illustrate books. They sought to live a way of life in which the sacred and the profane were no longer mutually exclusive but instead complemented each other (Van Herwaarden 1984, Weiler 2006, Van Dijk 1982, p. 4-13).

61 Schilling 2001, p. 12891-12894.

62 This does not alter the fact that there were several important 'precursors' of this revolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Think of the city republics of North Italy (Pocock 1975) and the revolutions that took place in England (Pocock 1980). The republican tendency also exerted great influence in the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, as the work of Spinoza, Grotius, Cats and Stevin illustrates.

63 Poggi 1972, p. 6-17, 22, 27.

replaced the social order with a new one. Henceforth, all citizens were equal before the law, and political power could only be derived from the will of the people. Social and economic differences remained, of course, but political prerogatives could no longer be derived from such differences. All citizens had the right to interfere with the public good, and the national government had to respect their rights as people and as citizens. In this way a political order unfolded that has defined public life to this very day.⁶⁴ This did not mean, of course, that the people had significant influence nor that those included among 'the people' was always the same.

The ensuing history reveals how the process of political participation went on in fits and starts. Although the monarchy survived the entire nineteenth century in many European countries, representative institutions began to play an increasingly important role in public life. Political parties, trade unions and other associations that were able to mobilise their own supporters began to spring up. The liberals initially rejected the greater influence of the masses but then cast off their reservations in the second half of the nineteenth century. Even the Catholic Church, which had repeatedly rejected the legacy of the French Revolution, was compelled at the end of the nineteenth century to concede to participation in the democratic process. A similar step was taken by the socialists. In the early 20th century, they gave up their revolutionary aspirations in various countries and opted for reform via democratic means. In fact, the project of political democracy in the West was only in danger once: between 1914 and 1945 when Mussolini and Hitler used elections to establish a dictatorship, similar to the one installed in Russia by Lenin and Stalin. After the Second World War, the system of parliamentary democracy was secured in the West, and in 1989 many East European countries chose to align themselves with this history.⁶⁵ A preference for democratic procedures also emerged elsewhere in the world, albeit following many experiments and alternative models. Thus unfolded the impressive but complicated rise of an order that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century and to this day forms the foundation for modern political relations.⁶⁶

The third revolution that shaped modern society is the *industrial revolution*. As is well known, this upheaval first occurred in England, where

64 Poggi 1972, 30-33.

65 Sheehan 2001, p. 3410-3412.

66 Fukuyama 2014, p. 50-220.

factories for mass production were set up at the end of the eighteenth century. Steam engines and other forms of technology were also used. Historians have long assumed that the process of industrialisation in the rest of Europe involved nothing more than copying the English method. However, more recent research reveals that the early industrialisation of England was not a model but rather an exception. On the continent, industrial production came about later and in a different manner. In certain areas characterised by demographic pressures and unproductive agriculture, many had no choice but to move into cottage industries. Based on factors such as natural resources, roads, available capital and the existing demand for products, the first regional specialisations began to crop up. In the course of the nineteenth century came the switch from cottage industry to the more large-scale company. Factories were established in which large numbers of workers did work that they used to do at home. Only in the second half of the nineteenth century did the European continent move on to large-scale machinery.⁶⁷

Truly modern industry only came about at the beginning of the twentieth century. By then, there were factories all over Europe where thousands of labourers worked and where the production was largely determined by technology. The labour process was divided into numerous tasks that were carried out at high speed, which resulted in a significant increase in productivity as a whole. Economic life also began to take on a new form in social terms. Labourers organised themselves so that wages and other working conditions became the subject of negotiations with the trade unions. This led to more or less stable labour relations, which were in turn conducive to economic growth. This pattern continued until after the Second World War. In many countries, the economy was stimulated by the government. In the meantime, the share of the labour force working in industry grew. But in the course of the 1970s, a change began to occur: the share of the industrial sector declined and that of the service sector increased.⁶⁸ Relations between the social partners came under pressure, while the trade union movement went on the defensive. This led to important changes on the social front. Nonetheless, to this day production continues to take place within the economic system that emerged approximately a century ago. The industrial revolution has thus left a lasting mark on modern life.

67 O'Brien 2001, p. 7362-7364.

68 Fridenson 2001, p. 7344-7346; Crouch 2001, p. 7347.

6 Theories and trends

Although the changes mentioned above occurred in the past, they continue to make themselves felt. As a result, our modern existence can be defined as the product of a cultural revolution, a political revolution and an economic revolution. But this still does not clarify the specific nature of these changes, which is why in this section we will be discussing three trends or processes that are associated with modernisation. We do so with the help of three authors who have done much to shed light on these processes, thereby exerting considerable influence on the development of theory in this area.⁶⁹

The first author we discuss is Max Weber (1864-1920), in particular his understanding of the phenomenon of *rationalisation*. The intellectual and moral revolution of the seventeenth century plays an important role in his work.⁷⁰ Weber argues that the Protestant ethic contributed significantly to the development of the capitalist economy. Driven by their doctrine of predestination, Protestants developed a new work ethic that was characterised by moral discipline, hard work and a rational attitude. They considered success in business a sign that one had been chosen for salvation.⁷¹ In a later phase, the theological significance of this attitude was lost, but the attitude itself prevailed. Present-day capitalistic companies are still focused on labour discipline, rational organisation and business success. Weber draws attention to the pursuit of rationalisation as an attempt to bring down expenses and continually raise productivity.⁷² Incidentally, this is something that takes place not just in the world of business. Education, warfare and state management have also been rationalised. There are professionals who are specialised in certain tasks and work in a rational manner. Partly because of this, the effects of the scientific revolution are noticeable everywhere. Not only modern enterprises but also administrative bureaucracies, healthcare systems or railway systems are increasingly pursuing a rational work method. The scientific ideal of 'knowing by measuring' can be found in all sectors of society.⁷³ Weber was the first to systemati-

69 The next section is largely consistent with Van den Brink 2007a, p. 32-35. One difference from our earlier text is that we have given a more prominent place for Marx's ideas.

70 When referring to the Protestant ethic, Weber primarily had in mind the ascetic thinking of the English Puritans and the Dutch Calvinists. Adam Smith's thinking not only stemmed from another tradition but also strongly opposed all attempts to provide a religious legitimisation for human morality.

71 Weber 2003 [orig. 1904-1905]; see also Lash & Whimster 1987, p. 5.

72 Turner 2001, p. 16403.

73 Scaff 1989, p. 228.

cally analyse this tendency. Almost one hundred years have passed since he wrote about this topic, but time has not affected the relevance of his analysis. On the contrary, even today we see the process of rationalisation take hold of entirely new sectors. This certainly appears to be an essential aspect of modernisation.⁷⁴

This trend has several consequences that require our attention. First, it leads to a disenchantment with the world. Elements of a magical, religious or ritual nature are eliminated by modern institutions. The same holds for individual preferences or personal deliberations.⁷⁵ All work must proceed according to a fixed procedure, and everyone must be held accountable to formal rules. The result is that the pursuit of rationalisation often leads to a disciplined and depersonalised world (Weber's 'iron cage'). Second, this world becomes heavily dominated by instrumental rationality. Scientific rationality has little to offer us as far as political and moral issues are concerned. It will not pass judgement on the propriety of a particular goal or ideal, but it can say something about how one can achieve certain goals and what means one should deploy to reach them.⁷⁶ Consequently, modernisation often boils down to an improvement in instruments and procedures.⁷⁷ Third, precisely due to the emphasis on technical and impersonal work methods, the different domains develop into various stand-alone worlds. In fact, modern life breaks up into separate spheres such as the economic, political or legal spheres, which not only have their own rationality but also set their own goals.⁷⁸ All three of these consequences play a stronger role today than they did when Weber first pointed them out.

This does not mean that rationalisation is the only or most essential aspect of modernisation. Equally important are the political and social consequences of the American and French Revolutions, a fact that was recognised at an early stage by Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). We will therefore outline his key ideas. According to him, the revolution created a new kind of society in which everything revolves around the idea of equality among citizens. This equality is not limited to political rights but also takes the form of mental, social and economic equality. The old order was marked by tradition and hierarchy, but the new society is committed to egalitarian relations and mobility.⁷⁹ Partly as a result, the significance of

74 Schluchter 1988.

75 Weber 1922, p. 650-678; see also Scaff 1989, p. 224-227.

76 Lash & Whimster 1987, p. 6-7, 9-10.

77 Scaff 1989, p. 230-234.

78 Lash & Whimster 1987, p. 11-15.

79 Tocqueville 2011 [orig. 1835-1840], p. 304-305; see also Drescher 1968, p. p. 251, 269-271.

tightly knit groups diminishes, while the single individual becomes more important. When citizens do establish relationships with one another, such relationships are voluntary and egalitarian. Moreover, they are often short-lived. On the economic front, trade and industry play an important role, with technical innovation quickly becoming popular and social mobility gradually increasing. Because the extreme differences between the rich and the poor decline, a sizeable social middle class comes into being.⁸⁰ In addition, more and more associations are launched: they consist of citizens that come together voluntarily to commit themselves to a shared interest or to exert their influence in the public domain. Tocqueville considered them schools for democracy: through such actions, citizens realise how they need to organise themselves or contribute to public opinion. In all these processes, one notices a tendency towards democratisation. Sometimes the democratic aspirations take less desirable forms, for example when a power emerges that looks after everyone in a coercive way. In that case, citizens may be equal but they also give up their freedom and independence.⁸¹

Although Tocqueville mainly researched the recent past and used it as a basis for drawing a number of conclusions, his analysis is still relevant.⁸² The pursuit of democratisation continued not only in the nineteenth century but also in the centuries that followed, with several consequences. First, political participation increased in the course of the twentieth century. Participation was mainly indirect because a large portion of the population was represented by organisations. The leaders of political parties, trade unions and cultural associations were the ones who shaped the public good, but they were compelled to duly take into account the views of their constituencies. In the course of the 1960s this participation became more direct, with the most diverse groups of citizens actively working to improve the public good.⁸³ Second, on the economic front a gradual levelling took place throughout the twentieth century, with differences between high and low incomes progressively flattening out. This development led to a large and stable middle class as well as a relatively sizeable welfare state that increasingly mitigated a wide range of risks.⁸⁴ Third, over the years a more egalitarian and informal form of social interaction arose. Following (and partly due to) the Second World War, authority and social class lost

80 Poggi 1972, p. 3-5, 23-27, 34-40.

81 Poggi 1972, p. 47, 58-59.

82 Kinning 2011, p.1067-1073, 1105-1124; Valade 2001, p. 15762-15766; Drescher 1968, p. 6, 256-257.

83 Koole 2001, p. 151-170.

84 De Swaan 1989, Van Zanden 2001, p. 187-200; see also chapter 2, section 8 and 9.

legitimacy and made way for a mentality that prioritised the equality of all citizens. This demonstrates that democratisation involves far more than holding elections – it also implies a political habitus, economic relations and cultural preferences that apply the principle of equality among citizens. As with the above-mentioned rationalisation, it is a trend that is an inextricable part of modern life.⁸⁵

This brings us to the third trend: the continuous movement towards more efficiency that characterises the capitalist mode of production in particular. Karl Marx (1818-1883) grasped the implications of this trend as no other. While Tocqueville needed more than one thousand pages for his treatment of American democracy, Marx and Engels were able to pen their analysis of capitalism in fifteen pages. With the benefit of hindsight, one could refute *The Communist Manifesto* line for line, and yet the text, with its prophetic zeal, remains a fascinating discourse.⁸⁶ It handles all the major themes of modern production: the emergence of a world market that was made possible by the discoverers and the growth in maritime transport; the invasion of all continents where capitalism sold its products; the development of new production methods based on the division of labour; the phenomenon of economies of scale which replaced the medieval workshop with factories, just as the factories were later replaced by large industry; a continuous increase in the capital needed for all of this and the concentration of the means of production, which allowed for only one ruling class; the unprecedented productive force that emerged as a result and the incredible technical innovation that was made possible; the overall mobilisation spawned by all this and the unceasing innovation leading to the dissipation of all established relationships; the collapse of national and regional borders that every nation – wittingly or unwittingly – incorporates into cosmopolitan traffic; and the dissolution of personal dignity due to everything receiving an exchange value. Marx and Engels' text points out contradictions that would make the end of this capitalism 'inevitable'. We all know this prediction was never fulfilled, but Marx and Engels were spot on in their characterisation of economic life in the modern era.⁸⁷

85 We would note that this trend relates primarily to social-political terms. In social-economic terms, the differences gradually declined until the 1970s only to increase again thereafter. According to a recent analysis by Thomas Piketty, it is primarily the wealthy who have experienced this growth (Piketty 2014).

86 Marx & Engels 1972, p. 40-55.

87 Note that modernity is emphatically mentioned in certain places (Marx & Engels 1972 p. 41 and 47). This fits in with their belief that history ultimately comes down to progress.

It is therefore not surprising that to this day there are many adherents of their point of view. What is striking is that Marxism is more useful for the peripheral zones of capitalism than for its core, a point that can be extrapolated from the theory that Immanuel Wallerstein developed in the 1970s. He describes how European capitalism shaped itself into a world system in which the core area dominates the periphery. Following the phase of colonialism and imperialism, this system has now reached the stage of globalisation.⁸⁸ This can also be deduced from Manuel Castells' theory about how society is changing as a result of the worldwide information network.⁸⁹ A Marxist perspective still resonates in such theories, even if it is mixed with insights from new theories. There are, of course, other views on globalisation possible. According to a survey from several years ago, opinion is now very much divided over not only how one should analyse globalisation but also how one should assess the phenomenon and fix the problems related to it. This brings up numerous questions. Are we truly on the path to creating one world where all the parts are connected to each other via large-scale networks, or will this process lead to the formation of a number of power blocs? Will the nation-state's legitimacy and effectiveness come under threat, or will states manage to strengthen their positions of power? Will there ultimately be one popular culture on a global scale or will ethnic, religious or regional identities experience a revival? All these questions are currently being debated. There are, nonetheless, a few things that are clear. There is no doubt that the scale, size and speed of international exchanges have increased sharply in recent decades, while the effects of these exchanges are increasingly coming to the fore.⁹⁰ The pursuit of efficiency and economies of scale still has the modern world in its grip.

7 Degrees of modernity

Up to this point we have looked at modern life from a historical and sociological perspective. One can also opt for a comparative perspective, which examines the extent to which the modernisation process has progressed in different countries. Here we see the remarkable phenomenon of a strong correlation between modernisation and the decline of illiteracy. According to Emmanuel Todd, the epicentre of this development was northwest

88 Wallerstein 1978, 2004; see also Hopkins & Wallerstein 1996.

89 Castells 1996, 1997 and 1998.

90 Held & McGrew 2003, p. 1-8, 32-39.

Europe, where a gradual increase in literacy occurred in the eighteenth century. As a result, by the end of the nineteenth century, the countries around the North Sea could boast that no less than 70 percent of their populations could read and write, while that percentage was much lower for the rest of Europe. In the period that followed, the literacy rate increased everywhere, but the main focal point remained unchanged. Around 1930, the map of literate Europe had several concentric circles, with the North Sea at its centre. The first circle included Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, where the entire population was literate. The second ring consisted of countries such as Ireland, England, Belgium, France, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania where at least 70 percent could read and write. In the third ring we had Spain, Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Russia where at least 50 percent of the population was literate.⁹¹ All this points to a process of cultural diffusion, with the growth of literacy beginning in the northwestern part of Europe and only later conquering the rest of the continent. This is also evident from an analysis of the development of literacy in France and Russia. In France, the process extended from the border with Germany in the northeast to the southwest. In Russia, the process began on the Baltic coast in the northwest and moved from there towards the southeast. In both cases, the Germanic-Scandinavian region proved to be the epicentre, and more distant regions reached the same level of literacy only at a later stage.⁹² This pattern is also relevant for other aspects of modernisation which, in general, first occurred in a number of countries around the North Sea, where they also had the most far-reaching consequences. They then reached other parts of the European continent at a later stage, permeating southeast Europe only quite recently. The geographical distribution thus reveals interesting patterns, which we aim to elucidate using several structural characteristics (see table 1.1).

In *economic terms*, the most modernised countries are characterised by a large share of their labour force working in the service sector, while the least modern countries are still heavily dominated by agriculture. At the beginning of this millennium, more than 25 percent of the labour force in Bulgaria, Ukraine, Turkey and Romania were engaged in agriculture compared to only a fraction in northwest European countries. At the same time, 70 percent or more of all employees in the economy work in the services sector in countries such as Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, England,

91 Todd 1987, p. 29-41.

92 Todd 1987, p. 41-43, 64-65.

Table 1.1 Economic, political and cultural indicators of modernisation

	EXP	GDP	IND	PAR	COR	EDU
	2010	2010	2010	2009	2009	2010
Denmark	13	128	46	8.9	9.3	33
Germany	12	120	40	7.8	8.0	8
Finland	10	114	40	7.8	8.9	23
Iceland	-	115	31	8.9	8.7	25
Netherlands	26	130	36	9.4	8.9	17
Sweden	13	124	40	10.0	9.2	24
Average	15	122	39	8.8	8.8	22
Belgium	28	121	35	6.1	7.1	7
England	5	108	31	5.0	7.7	19
France	6	109	35	6.7	6.9	5
Hungary	7	66	24	5.6	5.1	3
Ireland	20	129	22	7.8	8.0	7
Italy	6	103	31	6.7	4.3	6
Austria	14	127	36	7.8	7.9	14
Poland	3	63	25	6.1	5.0	5
Slovakia	9	74	23	6.1	4.5	3
Czech Rep	10	81	24	6.7	4.9	8
Average	11	98	29	6.4	6.1	8
Bulgaria	2	44	20	6.1	3.8	1
Greece	2	88	20	6.7	3.8	3
Portugal	4	80	18	5.6	5.8	6
Romania	2	48	21	6.1	3.8	1
Spain	4	99	23	6.7	6.1	11
Turkey	-	50	7	4.4	4.4	3
Average	3	68	18	5.6	3.8	4
Europe	10	100	28	6.7	6.0	11

Note

Column 1 (= EXP) shows the volume of exports in euros (1000) per capita of the population in 2010 (calculated on the basis of Eurostat dd. 27-3-2014). Column 2 (= GDP) shows the Gross Domestic Product per capita in 2010, with the European average set at 100 percent (based on Eurostat 27-3-2014). Column 3 (= IND) indicates the share of households consisting of one person in 2010 (based on Eurostat 27-3-2014). Column 4 (= PAR) indicates the score for political participation in 2009 (based on the Democracy Index from The Economist). Column 5 (= COR) indicates the perceived degree of corruption in 2009 (Corruption Perceptions from Transparency International). Column 6 (= EDU) shows the percentage of people aged 25-64 in 2010 who pursued some sort of education or training in the four weeks before the survey (based on Eurostat dd. 27-3-2014).

France and the Netherlands.⁹³ Another indicator, the volume of exports per capita, can be seen as the creditworthiness of national economies (not included in table 1.1). The lowest scores on this measure are found in the southeastern region, while the highest are all found in the northwestern region. The group of most creditworthy countries include Sweden, Finland, France, Denmark, England and the Netherlands, while Russia, Bulgaria, Turkey, Ukraine, Romania and Belarus form the rearguard.⁹⁴ One economic indicator running parallel to this is gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in 2010 (see table 1.1 column 2). If we set the European average at 100 percent, then Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Austria, Denmark and the Netherlands all score 120 percent or more. By contrast, GDP in the southeastern countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Poland and Hungary is much lower than the average at 70 percent.⁹⁵ We see a similar distribution when it comes to international trade. Northwest European countries are heavily focused on exports, while this is much less the case for the southeastern region. This is illustrated by the value of exports per capita (see table 1.1 column 1). While this value in 2010 was 10,000 euros or more per capita in Finland, Germany, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, in Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Portugal this value did not exceed 4,000 euros.⁹⁶ These figures demonstrate that the more one moves from south and eastern Europe towards the northwest, the more developed the modern economy becomes. In any case, the above-mentioned trends of productivity growth and international orientation manifest themselves most strongly in the northwest. To put it in terms of values, one could say that the northwestern region is relatively efficient while the south and east of Europe are much less so.

And what about modernisation in *social and political* terms? One could choose to focus on the political process in the narrow sense but also on broader themes such as the degree of individual autonomy or urbanisation. At the start of this millennium, an average of 83 percent of the population of northwest Europe lived in a city, while this share was 72 percent for central Europe and 67 percent for southeast Europe.⁹⁷ The modern nature of social life is also reflected in a deep appreciation of individual autonomy. As an indicator, we took the number of people who make up a one-person

93 Figures relate to 2001 (Bosatlas 2006, p. 207).

94 Index for the creditworthiness of national economies in 2002 (Bosatlas 2006, p. 207). Note that these figures relate to the period before the economic crisis of 2008.

95 Gross Domestic Product per capita in 2010, with the European average set at 100 percent (data derived from Eurostat dd. 27-03-2014)

96 Exports in euro (x 1000) per capita in 2010 (calculated on the basis of Eurostat dd. 27-3-2014).

97 Percentage of the population that lived in cities in 2001 (Bosatlas 2006, p. 206).

household. As column 3 of Table 1.1 shows, this share averaged 39 percent in northwest Europe, 29 percent in central Europe and only 18 percent in the southeastern region. In terms of political life, we look at the government's performance.⁹⁸ Certain variables show that the functioning of governments in southeast Europe leave much to be desired. In particular, Russia, Belarus and Bulgaria have low scores on this indicator. Well-functioning governments can be found in countries such as Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Iceland, Finland and Sweden. Another item is the protection of civil liberties, which is currently up to standard in many European countries except for Turkey, Russia and Belarus. For the others, the differences between the countries are not very large. The champions in this regard are Sweden and Ireland (both with a maximum score of 10), followed by the Netherlands, Finland, Iceland and Denmark with a score of 9.71.⁹⁹ Finally, we look at a measure of citizens' political participation. The low-scoring countries are once again located in the southeastern region. The European vanguard includes the Netherlands, Sweden, Iceland and Denmark. With a score of 9.44, the Netherlands was ranked the second highest. This emphasises the fact that the process of modernisation is not limited to economic aspects but also has an impact on public life. What it boils down to is, in essence, the rights and freedoms of individual citizens. Once again, it is in the countries of northwest Europe that these achievements are safeguarded the most, while southern and eastern Europe still struggle with certain problems in this area.

Finally, we turn to the differences in Europe in the *moral and intellectual* realms. We begin by considering the area of communication and information. Today, information has a strategic significance for business, professional organisations and governments as well as for the private lives of citizens. Some parts of Europe have a longer and richer tradition in this regard than others. We already mentioned that the decline in illiteracy began in the northwestern region and spread from there to the rest of the European continent.¹⁰⁰ Traces of this pattern are visible to this day, for example in per capita newspaper circulation. The culture of reading that was established early on in northern Europe developed into a relatively

98 See, for example, the lists published by *Freedom House* (www.freedomhouse.org). In this section we also make use of an overview given by *The Economist* in which countries are ranked on the basis of the following characteristics: 1) the electoral process and pluralism; 2) functioning of government; 3) political participation; 4) political culture; and 5) civil liberties (*The Economist* 2008).

99 Score on civil liberties in 2009 (*The Economist's* democracy index).

100 Todd 1987, p. X, 29-30, 43.

strong interest in reading the newspaper. Around the year 2000, newspapers in Iceland, Finland, Sweden, England and the Netherlands had an average circulation of more than 300 per 1,000 inhabitants, while in the countries around the Mediterranean Sea this number was often lower than 120.¹⁰¹ We see similar patterns in the number of households that have access to the internet. Countries with relatively high internet penetration rates are Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and Finland. At the beginning of this millennium, four out of ten inhabitants in these countries had an internet connection, but in the southeastern part of Europe this share was in many cases 10 times lower.¹⁰² It is important to look not only at internet penetration rates but also the way in which the internet is used. Interest in learning, which since the Reformation has penetrated increasingly broader layers of the population, rose especially in northwest Europe. Column 6 of Table 1.1 shows that on average 22 percent of adults in that region regularly followed some sort of training. In central and southeast Europe, interest in learning was at a much lower level – eight and four percent respectively.¹⁰³ What is also telling is the regional differences in the degree of perceived corruption.¹⁰⁴ The group of countries perceived to be least corrupt includes Denmark, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Iceland and Germany. In 2009, these countries scored an 8 or higher on a scale of 0 (much corruption) to 10 (no corruption). The average score in the northwest was 8.8, while central and southeast Europe had average scores of 6.1 and 3.8 respectively. Although an indicator measuring perception does not tell us everything, the differences are remarkably large.¹⁰⁵ In any case, we are inclined to interpret these data – together with those on learning and information use – as a consequence of cultural modernisation.

All this confirms the fact that certain values and trends that we have put forth as characteristic of modern life still prevail in present-day Europe.

101 Number of newspapers sold per 1,000 inhabitants in 2000 (Bosatlas 2006, p. 209).

102 Number of people connected to the internet per 10,000 inhabitants in 2001 (Bosatlas 2006, p. 209).

103 Percentage of people aged 24-65 who pursued some sort of education or training four weeks before the survey in 2010 (based on Eurostat dd. 27-3-2014).

104 Based on the 2009 overview drawn up by *Transparency International*. We use here the scores of countries on the *Corruption Perceptions Index*, which is based on thirteen different surveys.

105 The reason we need to practice caution with this measurement is that it represents the *perceived* level of corruption. It is possible that people in some countries tolerate more things than in other countries. The Dutch are relatively intolerant of corruption (as we shall see in chapter 6, section 8). The result is that corruption is relatively rare but it is also possible that, in the event of doubt, people react in an extra intolerant manner which causes the perceived level of corruption to rise.

When trying to understand the key issues in modern society, one must appreciate the fundamental significance of the search for truth and honest behaviour. It is partly because of this that the pursuit of rationalisation continues. It is also important to grasp the importance of principles such as freedom and the equality of citizens – principles that belong to the political domain and that create a dynamic that leads to increasing democratic expectations. Finally, issues such as productivity gains and economies of scale have had an unprecedented impact on modern life, creating a global economy that is in many ways connected to political and mental processes without it corresponding directly to these processes. Although these changes have gone the furthest in the northwest of Europe, this does not mean that they have not occurred elsewhere. On the contrary: modernisation processes have emerged almost everywhere, and this is precisely why the question of the relationship between morality and modernity must be explicitly asked.

8 The tension between morality and modernity

In order to present the theoretical structure of our argument, we have so far dealt with our two central themes separately. We first explained what we mean by moral sentiments, and then we gave our vision of modern society. This method has unwittingly created problems for us, for a crucial question is how modernity and morality interact with each other and what the consequences of that interaction are. This problem has both a theoretical and an empirical side, and it must be clarified before we can continue. The empirical problem relates to the elucidation given above. What lies behind the substantial differences between European countries? If it is true that modernisation rests on a combination of rationalisation, democratisation and economies of scale, then why has this process not reached all regions? Why is it that these processes trigger less resistance in northwest Europe than in the south or east of our continent? What factors explain the fact that the introduction of modern methods have led to different outcomes here and there? These questions are no less urgent when we turn our gaze to the world as a whole. It is undeniable that processes of modernisation have had a great impact in recent decades on life in China, India, Nigeria, Brazil and numerous other countries. And yet these societies are not on their way to becoming 'European', let alone northwest European. This first problem can be summarised in the following question: *Where does the worldwide variation in modern life come from?*

Our second question is of a theoretical nature and stems from the way we use the concepts of modernity and morality. There are two different normative worlds at stake here. To preclude any misunderstanding, we would emphasise that modernity is also built on values. It would be wrong to reduce it to a technical or instrumental way of doing things. A modern society can only exist if its members share a number of fundamental ideals that they take seriously. One could even consider living up to ideals as an important characteristic of modern life. Modern citizens do not limit themselves to simply acknowledging values: they want to put them into practice and will not rest until this has at least partly succeeded.¹⁰⁶ Above, we have seen which values we are talking about here: being honest, speaking the truth, treating others as equals, respecting human rights, striving to achieve progress, working in an efficient or effective manner, etc. These values are not only acknowledged by a majority of modern citizens, they are simply indispensable in the sense that society would immediately fall apart if one of these elements was missing. We must not, however, equate these values with the issues that Adam Smith characterises as our morality. In human morality, feelings of approval or disapproval play a role, and this is something different from rationality. Smith talks about the impartial spectator who judges human actions, but this is something different from the recognition of equality or respect for individual liberties. And finally, moral sentiments are always born out of a specific situation and cannot be converted into general rules or models, which is quite different from the functional, large-scale organisation upon which modern society is based. In other words: although morality and modernity are both normative, the overlap between these worlds is limited. This second issue we can summarise as follows: *How should we view the incongruity between modern and moral values?*

In struggling with this issue, it occurred to us that there is in fact one perspective from which one can provide an answer to these two questions. In both cases, much – if not all – depends on the social and moral history of a particular society. We believe that the modernisation of a society never progresses in a ‘pure’ manner. There is always a moral, intellectual and religious tradition resulting in specific values. The nature of this tradition

¹⁰⁶ Modern life is characterised by an attempt to take one’s own values or ideals seriously. Ideals that are not converted into action do not count. This attitude was expressed by Marx in a paradoxical manner when he commented on the philosopher Feuerback as follows: ‘The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it’. The paradox lies in the fact that it was precisely this thought that brought about great socio-political change. It is now one of the basic axioms of anyone who wants to improve the world.

is, of course, diverse. China, for example, has a cultural history going back two millennia in which values borrowed from Confucianism have been enshrined. This has created as it were a sediment of thoughts, sensitivities, habits and ideals that are utilised in the daily lives of the Chinese. Any attempt to move towards a form of modernisation must take this history into account. More specifically, this means that an acceptable combination of traditional values (e.g. respect for elders and authorities) and modern principles (e.g. more space for the individual) must be found. In India, Nigeria and Brazil, modernisation may work out very differently from that in China. Even when we are talking about the same modern value (e.g. more space for the individual), the acceptable mix will look different because the social-cultural history of India, Nigeria and Brazil does not include Confucianism. In other words, precisely because there is a wide variety worldwide in the aforementioned sediment of values, trends such as rationalisation, democratisation and economies of scale give rise to different situations everywhere. This could also explain why modernisation processes in Europe have developed so differently. While forms of democratisation have been introduced in southern Europe, it remains a fact that Spain, Greece, Turkey, etc. have traditionally had a relatively authoritarian culture that differs significantly from that of northern Europe in terms of values. This line of thought must of course be empirically tested, but in theory we can find an answer to our first question in this manner.

This line of thought also provides a solution to our problem of the relationship between morality and modernity. Theoretically, one could argue about which of the two elements has priority. Personally, we believe that many of the values derived from our moral history are older than the principles of modern society (our arguments are given in chapter 2). This does not mean that there are no tensions – on the contrary. It simply means that we must understand these tensions by looking at the way in which modern trends such as rationalisation, democratisation and economies of scale affect moral sentiments that already existed before the modern era. It is by no means certain what the outcome of that interaction will be. In theory, several outcomes are possible, a few of which we will specify shortly. We limit ourselves here to the consequences of this on a conceptual level. It means that we can no longer think in terms of a ‘pure’ morality or modernity. Our starting point must be that in every situation and every period of modern history, there is a specific mix of motives that refers to the character of moral sentiments on the one hand (sympathy, situation and community) and to the principles of modern society on the other (truth, equality and efficiency). This recommendation may sound rather abstract,

but it is crucial for the thrust of our argument. We will elaborate on this point in the following chapters.

Incidentally, we are not the first to approach the interaction of modern values and socio-cultural tradition in this manner. In *Multiple Modernities*, a multi-author volume edited by S.N. Eisenstadt, one of the authors explicitly describes how technological, economic and political institutions from western Europe spread to the rest of the world, where they encountered the foundations of an existing culture. The general thoughts and expectations of modern life are thus implemented in a region-specific manner. But this process does not unfold smoothly – it requires a continuous process of debates, interpretations, opposites and re-interpretations.¹⁰⁷ The result is similar to what occurred in the first phase of modernisation in Europe: not only did new ways of thinking arise about people and society, religion and science, law and commerce, but man's entire way of thinking began to function in a different way – one that provided a general, stable framework while allowing for constant renewal.¹⁰⁸ Today, these processes are taking place throughout the world, and in this sense one could say that modernisation is becoming a global affair. This is also apparent from the fact that certain matters such as a democratic state, a liberal market economy, an independent judiciary or scientific research are accepted in many regions. And yet we are not heading for a world that is homogeneous in the moral, cultural or philosophical sense. What is emerging instead is a multiple modernity in which non-Western countries appropriate the modern programme on their own terms.¹⁰⁹ The conclusion must then be that the way in which moral and modern values interact with each other is to a large extent determined by time and context. This is good news, we are inclined to add, because otherwise empirical research on this interaction would be superfluous.

9 The moral effects of modernity

Before we move on to our empirical research, we should explore the possible moral effects of modernity. What can we say theoretically about the interaction between moral sentiments and modern society? We just wrote that morality and modernity are two incongruent worlds, but this seems to

¹⁰⁷ Wittrock 2000, p. 54-57.

¹⁰⁸ Wittrock 2000, p. 39-41, 44-49.

¹⁰⁹ Eisenstadt 2000, p. 1-3, 23-24.

be an exaggeration. There is a certain degree of tension between modern principles such as rationality, individualism and efficiency on the one hand and on the other hand moral principles such as compassion, a sense of community and engagement.¹¹⁰ At the same time, when it comes to practical matters, the modern man is quite capable of solving these tensions. Real problems only emerge when one of two sides is considered to be absolute or when the tension takes the form of a dilemma. This can happen if an influential party (government, financier, military ruler, employer, etc.) chooses – too quickly or too one-sidedly and without taking into account the moral sentiments of other parties – to pursue a strategy of modernisation. It can also occur if the moral involvement of certain parties (citizens, employees, believers, activists etc.) are in no way able to relate to the most urgent issues arising from modernisation processes. The issue of how to achieve a mix of motives that is acceptable to all parties is a question of tact. It always involves matters such as the right timing and tone. History teaches us that the possible effects can vary considerably and that they can be both positive or neutral, ambivalent or negative. To illustrate, we will briefly touch upon a few possible effects (see figure 1.1).

To begin with, there are many ways in which modernisation can result in a reduction or even disappearance of moral sensitivity. This can occur, for example, when one knows too much. Those who engross themselves in a complicated criminal case for a long time can reach the point where they know so many sides of the case that it becomes impossible to take a moral position. The same can happen with too much academic research. Moreover, the role of academic insights in moral decisions is rather over-rated: more knowledge often leads to a suspension of one's moral judgement. Those who absorb the daily news may feel it is impossible to have moral sentiments, however awful the content of the news is. These examples show that rationality and knowledge can lead to a form of *moral blinding*. But the effect of modern life can also be very different. It sometimes results in people choosing a more robust disposition, for example in reaction to increasing individualism. They would then stand up for shared norms and turn against people or groups that flout these norms. One example is the *moral hardening* that we see today in the way we deal with felons. This hardening can also arise from a legitimate attempt to protect people from

110 The realisation that the Enlightenment brings with it its own dialectic has already been expressed by Adorno and Horkheimer (1987). However, they had little appreciation for the fact that morality and modernity always occur in 'mixed' form, with the result that the tension of the two moments quickly takes on dramatic proportions in their analysis.

extreme dangers such as a terrorist attack. And finally there are also factors or situations that extinguish any kind of moral sensitivity. This is often the case with large-scale organisations where all that matters is effectiveness and efficiency. An example of this is the behaviour of bankers and other officials who have enriched themselves in recent years. If one points out their immoral behaviour, they often simply refer to their market value, thereby emphasising the fact that their environment shows signs of *moral erosion*. These are just a few examples of the ways in which modern society has a negative impact on moral sensitivity.

We could just as well point to the reverse effect where (an element of) the modernisation process has the effect of stimulating moral sensitivity. This happens when the call for human equality leaves the legal realm and becomes associated with feelings of compassion. We have seen this happen many times over the past centuries. Examples include the pursuit of equal rights for women, slaves, homosexuals, ethnic minorities and other groups that have had to cope with discrimination. These efforts were often successful because people became more sensitive to their fate and because the struggle for humane treatment acquired moral significance. In these cases, modernity does not result in an erosion but rather a *realisation* of moral ideals. It is also possible to use this effect for political purposes. In that case, society's moral energy is *mobilised* for the public good.

Figure 1.1 Theoretical effects as a result of the interaction between modernisation and morality

	Rationality	Individualism	Large scale
Negative	Blinding	Hardening	Erosion
Ambivalent	Regulation	Privatisation	Moral panic
Positive	Radicalism	Realisation	Mobilisation

This is precisely what happened towards the end of the nineteenth century in the Netherlands when preachers mobilised parts of the population to form political parties. In their campaigns, they consciously focused on moral sentiments, deploying them in order to encourage political involvement.¹¹¹ This kind of engagement does not always have to be in the direction of modernity. The example of the moral majority in the US shows that, in certain cases, people will turn against modern life. One can also think of forms of religious and political *radicalism*. At the end of the 1960s, many students in Europe and the US developed a preference for left-wing radical thinking. Their activism stemmed from a combination of modernisation and moral engagement.¹¹² Although in terms of substance, the differences with the fundamentalism of present-day Muslims are significant, we cannot disregard the fact that moral ideals also play a role in the latter.¹¹³ In any case, there are many ways in which the embracing and expressing of moral sentiments are stimulated in modern society, which includes the entire spectrum from radical to very moderate.

In addition to a reduction (or erosion) and a strengthening (or radicalisation) of moral sentiments, the process of modernisation can also have ambivalent or more neutral effects. An interesting example is the phenomenon of *moral panic*. This term refers to situations in which deviant behaviour triggers an excessively negative reaction in society.¹¹⁴ In such situations, it appears that modernity and morality become completely disconnected, which gives rise to a mental fissure: on the one hand, there is an event that shocks us morally, and on the other hand, we cannot do anything about it. It is precisely this powerlessness that causes us to cling to morals. This mechanism occurs in a weaker form with moral indignation. On a regular basis – especially given the substantial media density of modern society – we witness incidents or behaviour that we morally reject. But we are not always able to link our actions with our moral sentiments, certainly if the incident is beyond our influence. We let off steam by proclaiming that something outrageous has happened, but we subsequently do nothing. In addition to these ambivalent reactions to the tension between modernity and morality, more neutral solutions are possible. One can switch to forms of *regulation*, where the morally appropriate response to a problem is established for all those involved. This would seem to apply to professional codes that are

111 Hoekstra 2005, p. 60-63.

112 Van den Brink 1991, p. 62-75.

113 Cf. Roy 2003, p. 75-102, p. 154-187; Buijs et al. 2006, p. 59-138, 233-277.

114 De Haan 2007, p. 252-264.

used in many professional organisations. Yet another solution is to *privatise* this tension: each individual can decide for him/herself how to handle the possible incongruity of moral sentiments and modern life.

The reader will no doubt understand that this list can be made longer, but we have deliberately chosen not to do so. We only want to show that the interaction between modern values and moral sentiments produces very different effects – it can give rise to a strengthening or a weakening of moral sentiments, while a neutral or ambiguous effect is just as possible. In the empirical sections of this study, we will examine the situation in the Netherlands in this regard. In conclusion, we note that political life plays an important but often underestimated role in all this. In our opinion, the task of linking moral sentiments to a modern agenda in the right manner is by its very nature a task for politicians. Ideally, they would do their work in such a way that they give rise to a combination of motives acceptable to many people. What should be avoided at all costs is a coercive imposition of modernisation, because this often leads to moral indignation, hostility or fatalism. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. In practice, administrative and political elites often persist with a unilateral form of modernisation, with the result that their adversaries have a monopoly on moral motives. If political leaders constantly argue that the process of European unification is ‘inevitable’ – to use a topical example – it should not surprise us when someone who has certain moral doubts about this process ends up in the opposing camp. This is the price one pays for the failure to establish a link between modern values and moral sentiments in the public eye.

10 What this book is about

In this final section of the introductory chapter, we give a brief explanation of our line of argument. What will we be presenting in the upcoming chapters? And to what extent does the material provide an answer to the question that concerns us here? It may be sensible to explicitly state the question we are focused on: *We would like to know what the role of moral sentiments is in modern society.*

While the rest of this book makes use of the theoretical insights set out in this first chapter, we would emphasise that our research is empirical in nature. We focus on the changes that Dutch society has undergone in the last half century. The Netherlands can be considered a prototype of modern society and gives us many opportunities to study in detail the complicated

interaction between modernity and morality. To this end, we make use of a wide variety of sources. We have access to a large amount of empirical data derived from databases that are well-maintained and accessible.¹¹⁵ In addition, we have conducted the required fieldwork. We spoke with professionals in the public or semi-public sector and supplemented this with our own observations where necessary. Research was also conducted using literary and visual sources, which was mainly focused on mapping out public perceptions. And finally, we conducted our own surveys for certain parts of our research. We do not claim that the many insights we brought together in this manner fit seamlessly into the theoretical framework we have just outlined above. We will use these insights mainly to determine how the interaction between modernity and morality manifests itself in the Netherlands. We have divided our findings into four main groups. In chapters 3 and 4, we look at how moral sensitivity in the Netherlands has been reduced, threatened or compromised by modern life. Chapters 5 and 6 investigate what moral values Dutch people currently cherish and whether any changes can be distinguished. Chapters 7 and 8 show that in certain areas we see a strengthening and increase in moral sensitivity, while chapters 9 and 10 focus on moral values that appear to be relatively immune to the impact of modernisation.

And now a word about the research on which this study is based. We must distinguish – as Karl Popper argued long ago – between the logic of discovery and the logic of justification.¹¹⁶ It is up to the reader to decide if the analysis presented here is convincing. We shall simply reveal something about the history of this analysis. This study is an extensive adaptation of *De Lage Landen en het hogere* (loosely translated: *The Exalted in the Low Countries*), a book that came out in 2012.¹¹⁷ We decided to adapt this book when it became clear that there was interest for an English translation. The present study differs substantially from the Dutch edition in four ways. First, we reduced the volume from over 600 pages to 400. This meant that we had to not only remove extensive explanations but also combine chapters that were about a related theme. Second, we had to make our findings accessible to an English-speaking audience. This meant we had to provide explanations for certain things that are general knowledge to Dutch people. We also had to describe several key features of the Netherlands as a modern

115 Among the main databases are those of the CBS, SCP, Eurostat and the European Values Study.

116 See Popper 1968, p. 27-33 and Marx 1974, p. 511-5112 (*Bien etonné de se trouver ensemble*).

117 Van den Brink ed. 2012a.

society, as it would be odd to assume that the average reader outside of the Netherlands would be familiar with these features. The most significant change we made was that our book could no longer refer to ‘the exalted’. The connotations of this word are unknown outside of Dutch-speaking circles. It is not even possible to translate this notion into proper English. Because English speakers *do* know the notion of ‘moral sentiments’, we decided to use this in the title.¹¹⁸ This change incidentally does not have much significance for the content of our book because there is an intimate relationship between the complex of spiritual values referred to by ‘the exalted’ in our Dutch title and the moral sentiments that Adam Smith had in mind.

One consequence of these adjustments was that – third – we had to view the situation of the Netherlands in a somewhat different light. *De Lage Landen en het hogere* was a book intended to underline the relevance of moral values, religious ideals and spiritual principles for modern society. The book was written to be polemical and to offer a counterweight to the atmosphere of cynicism and nihilism that has characterised public debate in the Netherlands since 2004. This may have resulted in an overly positive picture. In any case, in that book we barely discussed the negative effects that modernisation also has. With this new study, we aim to remedy this omission. We do not shy away from the dark sides of modernisation such as moral erosion and increasing aggression. The resulting picture of the social reality in the Netherlands is more balanced. One last but important change is that the present study puts forward a new theory about the relationship between modernity and moral sentiments, the thrust of which has been outlined above but which will only come to life, so to speak, when empirical data are examined. This is the challenge we face in the following chapters. We will immerse ourselves in a case that is specific in terms of both time and space: we focus on Dutch society, on the developments it has undergone in the last sixty years, and on the more general conclusions that we can make from these observations. But first we must take a detour by briefly outlining the history that has made thinking about moral questions such a complicated task.

118 I thank Cor van Montfort, who spoke with me in the spring of 2012 about plans for an English version of this research. It was during our discussion that the title of this book was born.

2 An archaeology of altruistic behaviour

Gabriël van den Brink

In the previous chapter, we argued that modernisation presupposes a substratum of values shaped in an earlier period. The makeup of this substratum depends, of course, on cultural-historical factors. The modernisation of the Netherlands or Denmark has a different historical background than that of Spain or India, resulting in an outcome that is different as well. But what exactly do we mean by ‘historical background’? How far back in time do we go? Do we limit ourselves to the top layers of this substratum that were formed in the period just before modernisation? Or do we go further into the past, delving into values that are much older? One could even turn to the biological history of the human species to look at certain mechanisms that emerged during the evolution of human beings and that remain relevant to this day. In this chapter, we attempt to say something – albeit in an extremely brief and sketchy manner – about each of these three historical backgrounds: the immediate past, the ancient past and our biological past. We focus our attention on how altruistic behaviour developed, as this forms the basis of our morality as described in chapter 1. Where does our capacity to act altruistically come from? And how do scholars view this development? This history can be compared to the process of sedimentation: a new layer is created periodically without the old layer disappearing. Our cultural substratum thus consists of several layers, one on top of the other. It is therefore crucial not to mix these layers up. Instead, we must determine what their specific contribution is to the set of values reflected in altruistic behaviour. In this chapter, we limit ourselves to three such layers.

We begin with some insights from contemporary biology that demonstrate how our social and moral behaviour has a basis in nature (section 1). Then we discuss the fundamental change in our mental make-up that took place a few hundred years before the start of the Christian era, which led to the growth of religious traditions in which sacred values played a crucial role (section 2). We briefly reflect upon the special role that Christianity played (section 3). We then come to the early modern period, when doubts about the Christian tradition were gradually raised and ultimately found expression in an ‘enlightened’ approach to moral questions (section 4). It took some time before this trend permeated large sections of the population. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century that moral behaviour was seen as an expression of social values and that the hegemony of Christian

thinking was openly called into question. The development that followed can be interpreted in several ways. Some scholars believe that what took place was a process of secularisation in which religious values disappeared or became marginalised (section 5). Others believe that morality became an increasingly private matter (section 6) or that moral motives made way for motives of a national or political nature (section 7). We believe that morality in West European history rests on a mix of three principles, namely life-sustaining (or vital) principles, religious principles and social principles. We also dwell on the remarkable fact that altruism has become more pervasive over the centuries. While selfless behaviour had long been restricted to matters affecting one's direct community, in the first half of the twentieth century it took on a national form (section 8) and subsequently developed into a behaviour that was directed at the entire world (section 9). The combination of these developments ultimately led to the many forms of moral engagement that characterise modern life (section 10). We expound on these forms in abstracto before using data related to the Netherlands to examine them more empirically in subsequent chapters.

1 Insights from biology

The insights revealed by biological research in the last thirty years can in many ways be considered revolutionary. We are not talking about the discovery of DNA and everything that stems from this but rather the series of insights coming from the field of ethology that have undermined several axioms held by many scholars studying the interaction between man and society in the West. Two of these assumptions are of particular importance here. The first axiom is that there is a fundamental difference between humans and animals with regard to social and moral behaviour. The second axiom is that there is a fundamental difference between myself and other people in terms of social and moral behaviour.

With regard to the first axiom, for a long time it was believed that the ability to resolve conflicts or social tensions was a specifically human capability. After all, humans possess reason, while animals are governed by sexual and aggressive instincts. It should come as no surprise to us, then, that outbreaks of violence regularly occur among animals. But in the last quarter of the twentieth century, this view began to change. Biologists discovered that conflicts are an essential aspect of animal interactions, with overt aggression or threats to use violence sometimes assisting animals in their negotiations. More importantly, they discovered that by nature many

animals have the ability to resolve conflicts and bring about reconciliation. Based on these findings, scientists have abandoned the old idea that social behaviour and aggression are mutually exclusive. It was traditionally thought that aggression triggered a break in the social relationship that led to individual animals having less contact with each other than before the conflict. Behavioural research shows, however, that individuals seek each other out even more frequently following a conflict and try to mend the damage done to their relationship. Although the tendency towards reconciliation varies per species, it is found primarily in close relationships. Research on primates has led to the conclusion that the stronger the social ties between the individuals involved, the more they will strive for reconciliation. Moreover, the cognitive requirements for reconciliation are not very demanding. Only the following conditions need to be met: 1) individual interests need to be recognised; 2) the animals must be able to recall any previous contact; and 3) cooperation must yield benefits. The propensity towards reconciliation following a conflict is present in many species. The fact that this behaviour is observed in species as diverse as primates, dolphins, hyenas and goats means that what we are dealing with here are evolutionary mechanisms that have developed independently of each other and that have something to do with the social life of the species.¹ All in all, this type of research forces us to abandon our belief that matters such as reconciliation and forgiveness only occur among human beings.

A similar shift has occurred in our thinking about moral action. Contemporary biologists reject the idea that animal life is all about the war of all against all and that altruistic behaviour is a purely human phenomenon. Instead, they have come to the conclusion that animals have two faces – just like humans. They exhibit on the one hand self-interest, egoism and rivalry, and on the other hand mutual support, commitment and cooperation. There are, of course, certain limits to this cooperation. As a rule, genetic relatedness has a positive influence on animals' propensity to help each other. This is self-evident from an evolutionary point of view: assistance from relatives will increase the chances of survival of an individual animal's genetic material. The greater the genetic distance, the less the inclination to help. This is also true with regard to the human species. We give our sympathy easily to someone from our own family circle, somewhat less easily to someone outside our community and only with the greatest difficulty to outsiders. It is also striking that women are generally more willing to offer

1 Aureli & De Waal 2000, p. 4-5; De Waal 2000, p. 21-24; Van Schaik & Aureli 2000, p. 307-308; Schino 2000, p. 234-235.

assistance than men. This is due to their capacity for empathy, as we shall see later in this book. In any case, the human race does not have a monopoly on social behaviour. According to Frans de Waal, forms of altruism can be seen in many animal species. He claims that man naturally possesses moral capacity, although he acknowledges that it is only effective once it is cultivated. He draws a comparison with our language skills: humans have an innate capability to learn languages, but it is the culture that determines which language a particular person will eventually speak. In the same way, our upbringing and society determine whether our moral capacity actually leads us to act morally. This is why it is crucial to stimulate the development of social norms, compassion, justice, cooperation and mutual assistance.²

In addition to the classic dividing line between animal and man, recent insights from biology also put into perspective the distinction between myself and another person. It turns out that people are less often an autonomous individual than liberal philosophy presupposes. This has become clear as a result of Simon Baron-Cohen's research into the phenomenon of imagining oneself in somebody else's situation. Empathy requires that one put oneself in another's shoes and take into account the thoughts and feelings of someone else in a spontaneous manner. This applies not only to pain or sorrow but also to more joyful emotions. It is not necessary for people to have actually experienced the same thing. Empathy requires that one is able to *imagine* how another person feels. On the basis of someone's facial expression or behaviour, we make a leap in our imagination and envision how the other person is feeling. This is, in general, more common in women than in men. This is no coincidence, as females among both humans and primates are the main caretakers of young children. Newborn babies cannot decipher what is happening to them, and yet it is of vital importance for them to know what might well happen. This is why women have a better antenna for emotional and corporeal signs. This does not mean that man is the complete antithesis of woman: for both genders, there is a certain distribution in the capacity for empathy. On average, women are more on the empathic side of the spectrum and men more on the autistic side, but there is a certain degree of overlap.³

We now know what the material basis of this capacity is. The human brain possesses a large number of nerve cells that enable us to understand the other person's intentions. These so-called mirror neurons allow us to not

2 De Waal 1996, p. 21, 48, 51-56, 77-78, 106, 143-145, 159; see also Killen & De Waal 2000, p. 353-354.

3 Baron-Cohen 2003, p. 33-35, 136-140, 160-162; De Waal 1996, p. 143-145.

only observe the words and actions of the other person but also understand the intentions hidden behind them. This has been proven by means of sophisticated techniques that make the neural activity in certain centres of the brain visible. The brain cells that are activated when we act upon our intentions are also activated when we try to imagine what another person has in mind. This means that human interaction is conducted in a different manner than has often been assumed. The popular model of a transmitter and a receiver exchanging messages is too mechanical. According to this model, the receiver is passive and the transmitter active, but in reality the receiving brain is constantly performing its own activity. For example, when we listen, our speech-motor areas of the brain are activated: it is as though we ourselves are speaking. This illustrates that although there is a difference between an individual ('me') and the other ('you'), the brain is continuously trying to bridge this difference. Unconsciously, I am constantly wondering what the other has in mind, while the other is doing the same with respect to me.⁴

In this interaction, the human face plays a fundamental role. For a long time, scientists believed that our facial expressions were culturally determined. It turns out, however, that expressing one's feelings through the medium of the face is a universal phenomenon. Emotions such as anger, fear, disgust, happiness, surprise, sorrow or contempt are associated with the same facial features across the world. It is true that the matching of facial expression to emotion occurs unconsciously for the most part. Once an emotion is aroused in us, a whole range of physiological and neurological processes are set in motion that naturally result in the contraction of certain facial muscles. Pleasure leads, for example, to our lips curling up and the small muscles around the eyes contracting. In the case of sadness, the voice naturally becomes softer, and we pull the inner corners of our eyebrows up. Due to these processes, human emotions can be recognised everywhere around the world.⁵ Intriguingly, it is not only the case that our faces express what we are experiencing internally, it is also the case that seeing someone else's face evokes specific emotions in ourselves. This mechanism (already postulated by Charles Darwin) can once again be attributed to mirror neurons. Psychologists define this as mimicry: when there is mutual interest, people tend to mirror each other's behaviour. They are willing to put themselves in the other person's shoes and to demonstrate empathy for each other.

4 Iacoboni 2008, p. 68-69, 80-85, 90-97, 105-113, 127-139, 218-221; Mieras 2010, p.80, 127-129; Keysers 2012, p. 233-248.

5 Ekman 2003, p. 18-21, 29-30, 35, 41-42, 50, 70-72.

2 The transcendental order

We are, of course, not the first to draw attention to the biological dimension of human morality. Over the past decade, publications in this field have experienced a veritable upsurge. Much has been written about the connection between moral behaviour and the working of the human brain.⁶ And there are plenty of authors who discuss the evolutionary history of our behaviour. Many differences of opinion relate to how we should see the relationship between nature and culture. Some scientists attach so much weight to the biological dimension that the cultural aspect of human morality is of little consequence. Others emphasise the cultural facet and maintain that humans are qualitatively different from animals when it comes to morality. One need not choose sides in this discussion to recognise that a few links are missing. There is a considerable difference between what happens in a colony of primates and the way in which members of a modern society deal with questions of justice and morality.⁷ It is not difficult to mention several factors that prevent us from reducing everything to biology. First, the size and complexity of our brains mean that our imagination is allowed to fully develop, allowing humans to imagine communities that are substantially larger than their own immediate group.⁸ Second, the invention of writing and other memory techniques have greatly increased our capacity to learn. As a result, cultural evolution occurs at a faster pace than that which natural selection would have made possible.⁹ Third, since the neolithic revolution, human beings began living together in large communities such as cities or states. This led to the formation of laws and other institutions, whereupon morality became more than just the interaction between individual people.¹⁰ In other words, there are many ‘missing links’,

6 Harris 2010, p. 91-112; Greene 2013, p.132-143; Swaab 2010, p. 287-301; Lamme 2010, p. 25-31, 213-220.

7 Buskes 2006, Lighthart 2001, Gould 1996.

8 See, for example, the Greek idea of a ‘cosmos’ that includes substantially more than the social group (Brague 2003).

9 Gould 1996, p. 242.

10 In his study of conflict management in human societies, Douglas Fry concludes that there are nine different methods worldwide. Four of them are dyadic in nature (avoidance, tolerance, negotiation and self-reliance), while the other five are based on the involvement of a third party (enforcing peace, the administration of justice, arbitration, mediation and peacemaking). The way in which a third party is deployed depends on the way authority operates in a particular society. In societies where certain people (for example, heads of families) have more authority than others, mediation tends to occur. Methods such as the administration of justice presuppose the existence of a strong central authority. It appears that methods of conflict resolution on

which means it is far from self-evident to say there is a direct relationship between our biological history and modern society.

In this section, we examine one of these missing links more closely, namely a period that Karl Jaspers has designated as the 'Axial Age'. This age started around 500 B.C. when a new kind of civilisation began developing in various places independently of one another. In Israel, prophets helped to bring about a dramatic change in religious life. In classical Greece, philosophers such as Socrates and Plato raised questions that until then had never been asked. In China, Confucius developed his own vision of life. In India, Hinduism underwent a period of renewal, followed by the flowering of Buddhism. At the beginning of the Christian calendar, Jesus began to preach his teachings. A few centuries later, this age came to an end following the life of Mohammed. While at first glance these developments appear to have little in common with each other, they all resulted in the same irreversible process of reform by postulating the existence of a transcendent order of religious, philosophical and moral principles that went beyond the secular order. While these principles differed in terms of form – in some cases, the focus was on ideals such as justice (China, Greece), in other cases it was on divine precepts (Israel, Islam) and in yet other cases a moral habitus was the main concern (Buddhism, Christianity) – they all share certain similarities. What is striking is that all these traditions incorporate a passionate plea for compassion, empathy, caring for one another, humanitarianism, mutual respect and the application of the Golden Rule.¹¹ They thereby articulate the tension between a transcendent order and a secular order, a tension that can be found at the core of all the world's religions to this very day.

How did this eternal tension come into being? According to sociologist S.N. Eisenstadt, intellectual elites played a crucial role in this process. It was the Jewish prophets, the Greek philosophers, the Chinese literati, the Hindu Brahmins, the Buddhist sanga, the Christian church fathers and the Islamic ulema who reflected on and institutionalised this fundamental tension between an earthly and a transcendental order. How, then, can this tension be resolved? A very simple answer would be that three solutions have been developed throughout history.¹² The first is to make a radical choice for a

the one hand exhibit general patterns and on the other hand are closely linked to the social patterns, moral values and cultural significances that characterise a specific society (Fry 2000, p. 337-347).

11 Eisenstadt 1986, p. 1; Eisenstadt 2001, p. 1916; Armstrong 2005, p. 10-11, 303-304, 345, 474; Lenoir 2010, p. 97-100.

12 This simplification stems from the fact that we have to consider not only the tension between an immanent and transcendent order but also how many gods play a role and whether we are

life according to spiritual principles, with the result that one withdraws from worldly existence. The second is the opposite of the first: one tries to incorporate spiritual or moral principles as much as possible into one's earthly existence, with the result that there is no separate sphere of gods or other religious eminences. The third solution is to constantly go back and forth between the immanent and the transcendent order. This last solution resulted in the development of various hybrid forms. For Eisenstadt, these three solutions pertain not only to the realm of theoretical possibility but also to actual paths that civilisations have followed in the past.

The first path is one that was taken by followers of Hinduism and, later, Buddhism. In these traditions, redemption or salvation was sought wholly outside mainstream reality. Those wanting to dedicate themselves to higher principles had to withdraw from social life, either by physically joining a community that had no worldly tasks or that was on the edge of society or by spiritually letting go of all interests and desires that characterise earthly existence. In both cases, the transcendent order was paramount. This created a realm of religious values, practices and institutions that was almost entirely independent of social and political reality. Whenever tensions between the transcendent order and the immanent order arise, solutions were sought in the religious realm. This path had a downside, however: it was limited in its ability to bring about a change in social reality. As a result, any effort to bring about fundamental change took place only at the individual level.¹³ It comes as no surprise, then, that Hinduism and Buddhism both emphasised the need for, and the possibility of, self-transformation. Both traditions have produced a wealth of religious techniques in the course of their history. Importantly, the use of these techniques is not limited to the political or social elite. In theory, anyone can seek his/her own enlightenment. All that is required is to pick out a teacher and to practice the techniques for a long time. Salvation or redemption is achieved not by worshipping an external god but by delving into the depths of one's soul. Above all, one must let go of the tyranny of the human ego. Those who succeed in doing so are not only happier, they also develop more compassion for their fellow human beings.¹⁴

With regard to the second path, Eisenstadt points to classical Greece and the Chinese empire, where the opposite track was chosen: this tension

talking about multiple gods or just one God (Eisenstadt 1986, p. 16-17; Eisenstadt 2001, p. 1918). The combination of these possibilities means that there are many ways to reduce the tension (see, for example, Eisenstadt 1986, p. 10-11).

¹³ Eisenstadt 1986, p. 237-238, 298-299; see also Dumont 1986, p. 25-26.

¹⁴ Armstrong 2005, p. 241-245.

between the transcendental order and the immanent order was resolved by working on (a change in) our earthly existence. This is notably the case with Confucianism. According to Karen Armstrong, Confucius was one of the first to argue that holiness can only be attained by dedicating oneself to serving others. This means giving up one's personal preferences or at least making them subordinate to the well-being of one's fellow human beings. Hence the great emphasis that this tradition places on social action. Although high moral standards are at stake, they must be adhered to within the existing political and social order. The result is that the secular order undergoes a process of sacralisation. There are no specific religious values, practices or institutions: all higher principles must be upheld within the existing social and political reality. Incidentally, in Asia this road also has a downside. Because the moral order and the political order are so closely intertwined, there is hardly any room for intellectual criticism. And as a rule, the rights of individuals remain limited. This was certainly not the case in classical Greece, where intellectual groups took very independent positions and did not shy away from criticising the political class in the name of moral or philosophical principles. Just as with Confucianism, the point was to live up to these principles within the existing social order. The philosophical debate on justice in ancient Greece was from the outset a political matter. And when tragedians such as Aeschylus or Sophocles brought the gods out onto the stage, it was above all to confront the polity with social-moral issues.¹⁵

Finally, there is a third path in which the emphasis is not on one of the above two paths but on moving back and forth between the two without any decisive resolution of the tension. According to Eisenstadt, this path is the one taken by the three monotheistic traditions that originated in the Middle East. It is evident in classical Judaism, which on the one hand recognises a transcendent God and on the other hand urges its followers to take social action.¹⁶ Adherence to both ambitions created a new dynamic, one that was reflected in the actions of the prophets. They reminded the people of Israel and their leaders about divine law but did not retreat from the prevailing social reality (cf. Hinduism or Buddhism) nor did they accept that social-political action was the only reality (cf. China or Greece).

¹⁵ Eisenstadt 1986, p. 29-35, 241-245, 252-259, 291-297; Armstrong 2005, p. 278.

¹⁶ This is apparent from the Ten Commandments which, according to tradition, were brought down by Moses from the top of Mount Sinai and had been etched by God onto two stone tablets. The first five commandments deal with man's duties towards God and the other five with the interaction of God and man. The emphasis lies not on the ritual but on the ethical side of the behaviour (Wigoder 1994, p. 31).

Already in the oldest part of the Bible, there are calls for people to adopt moral values such as justice, humility and caring for the weaker members of the human race. Tellingly, the Hebrew word for love of one's neighbour is synonymous with the word for justice. The moral message is propagated by prophets, who warn of the consequences if the message is ignored. In the history of Judaism, the prophet was a source not of wisdom but rather of law and morality; his role is ideological in nature. The classical prophets significantly increased the scope of the moral commandments. Their often fanatical call for people to obey the divine commandments was at the time a new phenomenon,¹⁷ one that regularly brought them into conflict with kings and other leaders who were more interested in power than in morality.¹⁸

For a long time, there remained a fundamental gap between the realm of the divine and worldly matters. Around the beginning of the Christian era, however, a development took place whereby rabbis translated the laws of Yahweh – a transcendent eminence in the Jewish tradition – into rules for everyday life. The Jews (in particular the Pharisees) thus came to believe that the family constituted a temple of God and that God was at work in every detail of daily life. This way of viewing the transcendent gained in strength after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. and the new diaspora that resulted from it. The Jews were encouraged by their rabbis to see their congregation as a new temple: as soon as they entered the synagogue to sing and say their prayers together, God was in their midst.¹⁹ At the same time, they clung to the transcendent nature of Yahweh. The result was that people increasingly began to see man as a sacred creature and to equate serving God with serving their fellow human beings. Rabbi Akiwa taught, for example, that the most important commandment of the Thora was to love thy neighbour and that a crime against fellow human beings boiled down to a crime against God. A similar message was preached by Rabbi Hillel, who emphasised that Jews should follow not the letter but the spirit of the divine law.²⁰

The dramatic transformation that occurred in the Axial Age thus had diverse consequences for various civilisations. How a civilisation viewed the tension between the transcendental order and the social order and how this tension was given shape in practice thus made a big difference for the

17 Wigoder 1994, p. 31-33.

18 As a result of this dialectic of power and moral, in the history of the West there has always been room for a critique of social reality. An overview of 2,500 years of 'critical voices' can be found in Laeyendecker 2013.

19 Armstrong 1995, p. 83, 87, 90-95.

20 Armstrong 1995, p. 95-97; 2005, p. 460-462.

actual functioning of the social order. The solution chosen in classical China led to a process of gradual adaptation that extended over a long time span and – at least in our view – did not take place very rapidly. In societies where Hinduism or Buddhism was the dominant influence, salvation was sought not collectively but individually and not necessarily by improving society but by disengaging oneself from the earthly world. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all sought to find – albeit in varying ways – the connection between the transcendent and immanent realms. Precisely because the two realms remain incongruent, this gave rise to a specific dialectic in which on the one hand conflicts are constantly occurring and on the other hand people are working to improve the world.²¹ We will return later to the peculiarities of this dialectic, as it relates to how we can interpret the changes that have occurred in the past half century.²² For now, we would simply note that a higher order is presupposed in all these civilisations. In this respect, the long history that began in the Axial Age is anything but over.

3 The uniqueness of Christianity?

We believe that Christianity is an extension of the Jewish tradition – not only because Jesus himself was Jewish but also because the substance of his message is closely connected to the development of Judaism mentioned above.²³ At the same time, there is a break that separates the two and that gives Christianity a number of features that distinguish it from the Jewish tradition on several crucial points. We mention two that are relevant to our inquiry.

First, Christianity rests not so much on a doctrine as on a person who exemplified another religious practice by means of his life, his suffering and his death. He radicalised the commandment to love one's neighbour in such a way as to include *all* people, even our enemies. He not only preached this, he also put it into practice. In doing so, he epitomised the morality that he advocated; he was an example that could be followed by his disciples and that later captured the imagination of millions of believers. This is what the theologian Hans Küng believes is unique about Christianity: the life and death of Jesus as it was recorded later by the Evangelists is all about

21 Nonetheless, the position of Islam in this regard continues to elicit discussion (cf. Roy 2003, Ramadan 2004; Küng 2006).

22 See chapter 9, section 10 and chapter 11, section 6 and 7.

23 Küng 2009, p. 61; Armstrong 1995, p. 101.

embodiment. The truth about Jesus is not theoretical in nature, it is dependent on human experiences and personal behaviour. It is precisely through the concrete stories of what Jesus did and said that the commandment to love one's neighbour can be applied to all the ambiguities of human reality. His life story thus has a persuasiveness that is missing in many other religious traditions. Jesus speaks primarily to our hearts and rejects the idea that we can fulfill our duty to love our neighbours by following laws or rules.²⁴ Although this message has unmistakable roots in the religious practices of that period, Jesus's life and death marked a break with the Jewish tradition.²⁵

This is also clear from the way Jesus's message was further elaborated and spread by his disciples following his death. Paul, for example, refined the new faith by declaring that those who love their neighbour have already fulfilled the law of God. Moreover, he believed that the new faith should be open to anyone who followed the example of Christ. In this way he expanded the circle of believers to non-Jews,²⁶ spawning a new community of faith in the early centuries of the Christian era that was based on the principle of equality of all believers. This new community focused on spiritual salvation through faith in Christ and initially had no interest in political matters. It was only when Christianity became a state religion that this changed. From that moment on, a remarkable phenomenon developed in which on the one hand the church had the political and legal structure of an empire and on the other hand there was a morality that was essentially at odds with the exercise of power.²⁷ This was to be a prelude to a long history of institutionalisation of the dichotomy between the transcendent and the worldly. While the church referred to the transcendent values and truths that God had revealed via Christ, it was at the same time a mundane organisation fully involved in politics and the exercise of power.

This turn of events had profound implications for spiritual life in West Europe. It meant that, until the late Middle Ages, social reality was defined in a dualistic manner (namely as a combination of religious and secular reality) and that politics and morality were constantly in conflict with each other.²⁸ A situation in which moral considerations had to definitively give way to considerations of power could never occur in the West – there was

24 Küng 2009, p. 58-61, 79, 84, 86, 89, 109.

25 See also Brague 2007, p. 86-93.

26 Küng 2009, p. 90, 116, 129, 153.

27 Küng 2009, p. 225; Casanova 1994, p. 47, 50.

28 Casanova 1994, p. 13-15.

always a certain moral reserve, even where a monarch or institution had absolute power. At the same time, situations in which morality was completely decoupled from the world were just as unlikely to occur – believers remained sensitive to the call to secular action. This ever-fluctuating balance between power and morality is one of the distinctive characteristics of Western history: there was a continuous search for ways in which religious or moral values could be converted into secular action, and at the same time an excessive focus on wealth and power was criticised in the name of religious or moral ideals.²⁹ The shape that this dialectic took in practice depended, of course, on the interplay of historical and social forces in that particular period. In certain situations, the church stood unmistakably on the side of an oppressive power, thus losing its moral authority. In other situations, the church was itself persecuted or stood up for a population that had no rights.³⁰

The famous doctrine of the incarnation of God is a telling illustration of the way in which moral and political motives continuously interacted with each other. Jesus himself never claimed to be divine. It was only after his death on the cross that his disciples ascribed a divine nature to him. The first signs of this can be found in the Gospel of John, which outlined how the Word of God took on a human form. This idea of the incarnation received more and more followers in the second century and became decisive for the way in which Church Fathers understood the dual nature of Christ: he was both God and man.³¹ It is not surprising that this theological innovation (which was unthinkable for and always rejected by Jewish believers) generated an endless series of conflicts and debates. There were many ecumenical councils that established an official doctrine, but the issue led time and again to disagreements and fissures. The problem became acute when Emperor Constantine made Christianity the empire's official religion and religious disputes threatened the unity of his empire. The debate about the nature of the Son of God in relation to the Father was the reason Constantine called the First Council of Nicaea in 325. A creed was established that left no doubt as to the divinity of Christ; this was imposed by Constantine on the entire empire. But the disagreements continued. It was only in 451 that the doctrine of the dual nature of Jesus was accepted by a majority of Christians.³² Political and moral considerations have thus from the outset shaped each other without ever fully concurring.

29 Casanova 1994, p. 49, 105-106.

30 Casanova 1994, p. 29.

31 Lenoir 2011, p. 103-108, 149.

32 Lenoir 2011, p. 147, 156-169, 178-189, 202-208, 231-247.

4 The beginning of the modern era

By the end of the Middle Ages, the relationship between transcendent values and social reality underwent a radical change.³³ Charles Taylor's research into the emergence of a modern identity is of relevance here. He describes how the good life – which in the past could always be traced to the upper echelon of society – increasingly came to be sought in everyday life. As a result, the traditional hierarchy was reversed: certain qualities or behaviour of the social elite came to be seen as morally reprehensive, while the life of citizens or artisans came to be considered the realm of moral virtues.³⁴

According to Taylor, the driving force behind this reassessment was the Reformation. Protestantism rejected not only the Catholic conception of the sacred but also any kind of mediation in the contact between the believer and God. It was assumed that humans could do nothing for their own salvation: it was only God who determined whether one was to be saved or not. This initially increased the tension between the transcendent and immanent realms, with the result that the personal dimension of faith was given more weight.³⁵ While Catholics could see themselves as passengers on a ship (the church) on a journey to God, Protestants could not do so because there was no ship in the sense of a collective movement that carried people to salvation. In the Protestant world, each believer had to row his/her own boat.³⁶ Thus the focus of religious devotion shifted to everyday domains such as one's career or family life. The world was increasingly seen as a place where the sacred was at work. One could even say that Protestantism was a return to a spirituality that the rabbis had already captured in words when they developed the principle of 'living according to the law' for everyday life.³⁷ This form of 'secularisation' was expressed in three ways.

In the first place, it brought forth a new work ethic. Taylor by and large accepts Max Weber's theory on the relationship between capitalistic prosperity and the Protestant ethic. Practicing a profession was seen as contributing to the work of God's creation. As a matter of fact, Protestantism

33 We are aware of the fact that there is a broad debate on how the transition from classical thinking to the early modern age should be seen, what role Islamic thought has played in this, what status should be assigned to the Middle Ages, etc. The reason we do not go into this is not only that space does not allow for such a discussion but also because we have not studied this material seriously enough.

34 Taylor 2007, p. 296-297.

35 Taylor 2007, p. 298-300.

36 Taylor 2007, p. 301.

37 Taylor 2007, p. 301-305.

radicalised the ethic of the Middle Age monks who equated praying with work. Once this sanctification of work was applied, it began to take on a life of its own. What Weber described as a form of *innerweltliche Askese* gradually spread, also to regions that initially were not affected by the Reformation. Soon, practicing a profession began to acquire the character of a spiritual task. The spiritual value of work was no longer determined by the nature of the work but by the spirit in which it was done. This was to result in a reassessment of commercial activity in the eighteenth century. The emergence of political economy as an independent study stems not only from academic insights, it also reflects the value that was increasingly attached to work in the field of trade and production.³⁸

Second, this moral mutation gave rise to a new appreciation of marriage and family life. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, marriage based on love came to be idealised among the higher social circles in the Anglo-Saxon countries and France. The old patriarchal relations were rejected, and family life was increasingly seen as an affective and moral matter. The influence of the family or the village community on married life made way for an ethic that focused on voluntary commitment and personal feelings. Mutual devotion and care were given more emphasis – both between spouses and between parents and children. Taylor rejects the idea put forward by some historians that before the modern age, parents did not feel love for their children. The feelings of love were always there, but love acquired a new moral significance in the modern age. This shift, incidentally, was not confined to the private domain. In the public realm as well, a greater appreciation for matters such as compassion and human benevolence developed in the course of the eighteenth century.³⁹

And third, human feelings in general began to occupy a more important place within society. It was almost as though people were reverting to classical antiquity, when notions about strong feelings played a major role. But there was at least one difference, claims Taylor. The new focus on one's

38 Taylor 2007, p. 305-310, 387-388; see also Weber 2003.

39 Taylor 2007, p. 392-397. In our previous study, *Moderniteit als opgave (The Challenge of Modernity)*, we attributed the increased significance of human involvement mainly to the socio-cultural changes that took place in the 1960s. This culminated in an emancipation of personal feelings and bodily experiences, a development to which the second feminist wave greatly contributed (Van den Brink 2007a, p. 30-31, 36-37, 40-44). Although the importance of this change is unquestionable, the work of Taylor and others make clear that they have a longer history. Signs of a new sensitivity arose not only in the nineteenth century (Romanticism) but as far back as the eighteenth and even the seventeenth century (Taylor 2007, p. 392-407; Veenbaas 2013, p. 129-154).

emotional life stemmed from the spread of deism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Unlike in classical times, there was a conviction that the moral realm could not be accessed from human reason. The belief began to take hold that ideas about good and evil were in large part shaped by intuition. When we lose control of our feelings, our reason can perhaps correct them but it can never replace them. Emotions thus acquired a moral status that they never had in antiquity. In line with this, there was a change in the way humans experienced nature. In classical thinking, nature was something that imposed itself on us. In the eighteenth century, nature became an experience that came from within. This was to develop into the inner experience that Rousseau and the later Romanticists wrote about, ultimately becoming a divine source that manifests itself deep within ourselves.⁴⁰

5 The secularisation of society

What happened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Although it is tempting to utilise Taylor's monumental work for our analysis of this period, we choose not to do so.⁴¹ This is not only because we do not have the space but also because we would like to turn to two questions that are crucial to understanding the relationship between morality and modern society. Our first question is how a moral significance came to be bestowed on the concept of society itself. The second is about the levels on which this significance manifests itself.

For our first question, we must necessarily delve into the phenomenon of secularisation. Let us not forget that for a long time the language in which moral questions presented themselves in ordinary life had been a religious one. Until well into the nineteenth century, a majority of the population thought about good and evil in religious terms. It was only in intellectual circles that questions were sometimes raised with regard to faith. Some even predicted that there would one day be a society without faith. The English freethinker Thomas Woolston was the first to venture a precise prediction in this regard. Writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century, he believed that Christianity would no longer be relevant by the year 1900.⁴²

⁴⁰ Taylor 2007, p. 383-387, 407.

⁴¹ Several reflections on Taylor's ideas can be found in Warner et al. 2010.

⁴² Stark & Finke 2000 p. 1, 28, 57. It was not only English intellectuals who exhibited a certain scepticism; atheism was also widespread among the population. According to Keith Thomas,

Such critical attitudes towards faith and religion emerged in other countries as well. In 1841, for example, the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach wrote a book entitled *Das Wesen des Christentums* in which he defined religion as a form of projection. He argued that the human race constantly produces values that are recognised as gods or as God. This is why we should interpret religion as a form of alienation. If mankind forgets that *it* is the one generating religious symbolism, it remains a prisoner of its history. It can only free itself by realising that religious ideals are expressions of its own being. For Feuerbach, this does not undermine the merit of religious ideals; the point is that these ideals do not exist in the hereafter but rather in world history and are thus realised on earth.⁴³

The repercussions of this view would be examined somewhat later by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who launched a programme of social reform in the following century that mobilised and inspired millions of readers. They formulated a secular history of salvation that argued that salvation asked for power formation. Religious traditions played only a supporting role: although they offered consolation to those who are powerless, they contributed nothing to society's development.⁴⁴ Auguste Comte held similar views. He believed that society was moving out of its theological stage, and he foresaw a new dawn in which science rather than religion would form the foundation for moral judgements.⁴⁵ In later decades, more and more

doubts about an afterlife were prevalent in early modern England (Thomas 2009, p. 233-234). It is therefore not surprising that Montesquieu encountered little evidence of religious life when he visited England in 1731.

43 Feuerbach 1994; see also Giddens 1993, p. 464.

44 All this did not prevent historical materialism from acting as a substitute for religion. This was the case in the Netherlands when Hendrik Gerhard published his *Schets van een communistische maatschappij* (*Sketch of a Communist Society*) in 1871. The book portrayed a future society in which money and private property no longer existed and the government took care of citizens from the cradle to the grave. Due to the abolition of private property, few crimes were committed. Incidentally, Gerhard was not the only Dutchman to publish such a vision. When concerns about workers' welfare reached a peak during the industrial revolution, numerous utopian works were printed. The relationship between utopianism and socialism remained intact until the end of the nineteenth century. In the decades that followed, two streams emerged: the first became politically active while the second opted for the development of an alternative to the existing society. The first group was affiliated with the Sociaal-Democratisch Arbeiderspartij (SDAP) and strove to have the labour movement gain enough power so that the struggle against capital could be resolved in its favour. The second group included a rich diversity of poets and dreamers who withdrew spiritually from reality. This was notably the case with Herman Gorter, who was to develop his own combination of social engagement, naturalism and poetic exaltation (Bank & Van Buuren 2000, p. 439-443, 471-475, 482-483).

45 Stark & Finke 2000, p. 28-29, 58.

intellectuals came to adopt this view. In the end, all the great thinkers of the nineteenth century became convinced that the importance of religion and faith would wane as the industrial society came of age. This view has to a great extent determined the direction taken by the social sciences. We saw in the previous chapter how Max Weber understood the process of rationalisation and the related 'disenchantment' of the world. Because capitalistic enterprises and state bureaucracies were increasingly switching to rational work methods, religious ideas slowly but surely began to lose their significance.⁴⁶ Emile Durkheim went one step further by claiming that it was society manifested itself in religious experiences. He rejected the idea that mental representations such as ghosts, gods or worldviews were the core of religion. In his opinion, religion consisted of the performance of collective rituals and the sharing of feelings. Only by acting together could the members of a group be aware of their underlying bond. It is precisely their collective action that created the enthusiasm and vitality that allowed the individuals participating to rise above themselves. In this way, they could share in a higher power that was ultimately the manifestation of their collective powers.⁴⁷

While the concept of society still had a moral basis in the eighteenth century, the sociologists of the twentieth century turned the situation around by declaring that religious and moral values fulfilled a social function. If this were not the case, they argued, it would merely be a question of time before religion disappeared. To many social scientists, this idea seemed so evident that they did very little empirical research to verify this idea, or they conducted research to substantiate what they already knew, namely that religious thoughts would inevitably become obsolete. In the 1960s, sociologists such as Peter Berger, David Martin and Brian Wilson argued that the process of rationalisation would result in a secularised society – as Max Weber had already foreseen. Scientists such as Thomas Luckmann, Karel Dobbelaere and Steve Bruce claimed that the process of functional differentiation was robbing religious institutions of their central purpose – as Emile Durkheim had already foreseen.⁴⁸ It was not until the 1970s that questions began to be raised about this consensus. Only when certain sociologists began to conduct more empirical research into whether it was true that religious thoughts, feelings or actions were disappearing in highly developed societies did it become clear that the situation was

46 Weber 2003, p. 76-89, 166-181.

47 Durkheim 2008, p. 35-36, 47, 206, 416-418, 425-427, 430.

48 Berger 1967, Dobbelaere 1981, 2002, Norris & Inglehart 2004, p. 8-9.

more complicated. Nevertheless, there are scientists who still believe that religion is no longer relevant in modern societies. We will limit ourselves here to two examples.

In *Religion and Modernization*, published by Steve Bruce and others at the beginning of the 1990s, the authors do not argue that faith is disappearing in modern society but rather that it is losing its significance within society. While they acknowledge that many people still believe in a God or go to church, they do not consider this a refutation of the secularisation thesis, which has to do with the societal function of faith. In the past, religion had been crucial for the social structure, as it provided answers to important questions such as how to raise children, how to give meaning to one's life and how to care for the poor. Today, such things are taken care of by specialised institutions.⁴⁹ The authors formulate an interesting qualification with regard to the secularisation thesis. They argue that the process of modernisation does not always proceed in the same manner. They distinguish between different patterns – the main difference being which social groups consider faith relevant. Are religious traditions embraced by the social upper class or by ordinary citizens? Is there a state that imposes certain religious practices, or is there a domestic or foreign power that suppresses the faith?⁵⁰ This demonstrates that secularisation in modern societies is not 'inevitable': much depends on social-political variables, in

49 In this respect, the authors can be associated with the classical secularisation thesis. Social trends such as social differentiation and increasing rationalisation meant that the role of religion became increasingly marginalised. Using modern technology, we can now solve many problems for which people used to use magic (Bruce 1992, p. 6-11,14, 199-201).

50 The authors discuss five patterns. The first occurred in southern Europe, where the Catholic faith was closely connected to the national elite. This led to a social division in which the clerical and anticlerical camps were pitted against each another. A second pattern appeared in England and northern Europe, among others, where Protestantism had become more or less a state church, with the result that discussions about the church or religious life did not lead to conflicts but to indifference. A third pattern could be found in societies founded by immigrants – such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US. These countries had a wide variety of churches that were closely linked to the everyday lives of citizens and that, unlike in old Europe, had no strong ties with the state or the upper class. The fourth pattern was seen in societies such as Switzerland or the Netherlands, where multiple faiths existed without any one in particular having the absolute majority. This led to 'pillarisation', a process in which churches mobilised their own followers and developed their own institutions to meet the needs of their followers. And finally, a fifth pattern emerged in societies whose cultural identity was threatened, for example because another state imperialistically imposed alien values on the population. In this case, faith became a means to preserve their own identity, and strong bonds developed between the population and the church. This occurred in countries such as Poland and Ireland. (Bruce 1992, p. 15-17).

particular whether religion serves the interests of a national state or the interests of the general population. This does not, however, alter the fact that the significance of faith can be reduced to the social purposes it fulfills. Sociology now determines the weight given to theology, while in the past it was theology that held sway over society. God can thus be reduced to a superfluous hypothesis.

This is more or less the same conclusion reached in *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, a book published in 2004 by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. The authors assume that the significance of religious values increases when people have to face great uncertainties, with the emphasis on what people experienced in their early childhood. Those who have confronted great dangers or risks during their youth often end up embracing religious values in later life.⁵¹ Accordingly, the need for religion declines as the number of certainties rises in the context of modernisation. It is therefore not surprising that there are clear differences between agrarian, industrial and post-industrial societies in terms of the importance of religion. The idea is that the significance of religion in the lives of individuals begins to erode when society evolves from being agrarian to industrial and then to post-industrial. This is why the public role of churches and other religious organisations diminishes in developed societies. This is especially true for western Europe and stems partly from the rise in prosperity there. Religious participation has declined in almost all European countries since the 1960s.⁵² At the same time, Inglehart and Norris point to a paradoxical development. While the rich, developed countries have become less religious, the opposite is the case for the world as a whole. This is primarily related to demographic developments: the population in poor, religious societies continues to grow while in the rich, secular West the population is shrinking. The authors predict that the gap between secular and religious societies will increase in the coming decades and that this will have far-reaching consequences for the international agenda.⁵³ An important merit of their research is that it rests on a solid empirical basis. The authors make use of the wealth of data gathered in the context of the *World Values Survey*, which allows one to make a comparison between less modern and more modern societies. But conceptually, they also adhere to the classical secularisation thesis. It is primarily the poor social circumstances that

51 Norris & Inglehart 2004, p. 13-14, 25, 53-54, 108.

52 Norris & Inglehart 2004, p. 22, 53-54, 73, 78, 84-88, 211.

53 Norris & Inglehart 2004, p. 5, 23-26, 241.

explain why a population, a social group or an individual embraces religious values. The more modernisation unfolds, the less this will be the case.

6 The moralisation of politics

To say that everyone shares the view that religious or moral values can be reduced to social circumstances would be caricaturing the social sciences. There are also authors who believe that the emergence of modern societies has led not to an erosion of moral sentiments but rather a displacement.

This is the case with how Benedict Anderson interprets nationalism. He points out that nationalist sentiments are still very much alive, even in countries that appear modern in every respect. Both Marxism and liberal theories fail to provide an explanation for this, as both types of theories are based on the existence of conflicting interests but neglect the existential aspects of the national state. Let us not forget that numerous citizens have been willing to sacrifice their lives for their country. This underscores the fact that there is a connection between religious imagery and nationalism. The power of religious traditions had always been that they provided continuity as well as a story about the significance of life and death. It was precisely on this point that the rationalism of the Enlightenment fell short. In essence, the secularisation of public life necessarily brought forth a new religiosity. There had to be a secular version of what religions always did – namely give a certain significance to history and to society – and this is what the idea of the nation was able to do as few other ideas could. According to Anderson, we should see the nation as an ‘imagined political community’.⁵⁴ This means four things. To begin with, nationality involves an *imagined* community. It is not a social community in the sense that all subjects know each other personally. As a member of a nation, I will never encounter the vast majority of my compatriots; I am only connected to them in the imagination. A second point is that the affected community has certain borders that must be safeguarded. Accordingly, they must determine time and again who is and who is not considered a member of that community. Third, every national community considers itself *sovereign*. Before the Enlightenment, legitimacy could only be derived from a transcendent authority such as God, but towards the end of the eighteenth century this was replaced by the sovereignty of the People. A fourth characteristic is that the assembled members genuinely form a *community* in the imagination.

54 Anderson 2006, p. 5-11.

However large the social differences or tensions, the nation always implies a form of connection and brotherhood. Without this element, millions of people would not have put their lives on the line, which is what has regularly happened in the last two centuries.⁵⁵

Such an imagined community does not come about by itself, of course. It is the product of a history in which various political and intellectual powers work together. In the course of the nineteenth century, lexicographers, grammarians and philologists joined forces to describe or develop the national language. Folklorists documented the customs and stories of the common people. Musicians were commissioned to compose national anthems, and historians wrote about the history of their fatherland. All this made the idea of a 'national community' very popular in the nineteenth century and a decisive influence on political thinking. Certain media played a central role in this formation of the image of the nation. Anderson cites the example of the newspaper and the novel. The newspaper is a heterogeneous collection of messages that have only one thing in common: the messages are printed in the same publication on the same date. At first glance, this comprises only a ritual form of 'unity'. But through the daily repetition of this ritual and because millions of people take part in it, a public opinion is eventually created that can exert much political influence. In addition to the newspaper, the novel had a strong influence on the social imagination. The genre was very popular with those who wanted to depict a social or moral landscape, and it reached a mass audience. Furthermore, widespread use was made of visual media such as engravings, maps and exhibits. Historiography played a part in this as well. Historians harboured not only academic intentions in their work but also gave themselves a moral-political task. The historian Michelet, for example, wanted to do justice to the sacrifice that earlier generations had made for their fatherland. He believed it was the historian's duty to determine the true significance of those lives.⁵⁶ In this way, the fatherland became a quasi-religious category, bestowing significance to events that had brought untold suffering. The fatherland became a glorious entity of which the poorest wretch could be proud. Anderson puts his finger on the ambiguity at the heart of any national engagement: at first glance, it would seem as though nation-states prioritise their political interests and distance themselves from any kind of faith; but at the same time they are only credible when they generate an imagined reality in order to construct a new community that transcends those political interests.

55 Anderson 2006, p. 6-7, 141-144.

56 Anderson 2006, p. 24-30, 33-35, 75-81, 109, 115-116, 134, 163, 197-198.

A phenomenon such as nationalism explains how people in modern societies sometimes resort to moralising or even sacralising profane matters. This occurred in the first half of the twentieth century when political ideologies such as fascism and communism drew such massive support. Eric Voegelin attributes the appeal of these movements to religious motives.⁵⁷ While in the past, society had been kept together by faith in God (or many gods), a different mechanism came into force in modern societies. Ideologies arose that were built around non-religious actors such as the state, the people, the leader, a race or a political party but which nonetheless functioned as a religion. This was a significant difference from political dictatorship, for it was more than simply the suppression of citizens by military or repressive means. These new ideologies laid claim to not only the body but also the soul of all its subjects.⁵⁸ Not content with passive acceptance or forced acquiescence, these ideologies expected their followers to devote themselves to its highest values. It is telling that totalitarianism, despite its embrace of a social or secular reality, essentially rests on a deep contempt for the world. It subjugates the earth to its own values and demands of its followers the willingness to sacrifice everything they consider precious.⁵⁹ Voegelin's analysis is a conscious attempt to distance himself from the way Weber saw modernity. The latter believed that Western society was characterised by an increasingly radical departure from the enchanted world. Although Weber sometimes spoke of a new 'struggle of the gods', he was referring primarily to the emergence of numerous domains that each develop their own realm of values. He believed that modernity marked the definitive divergence of the political from the religious and considered politics to no longer be a domain where religious aspirations could be expressed. Weber ruled out the possibility of a process of 're-enchantment' of political processes. But Voegelin disagrees. He argues that modern society does not show signs of secularisation. The religious is not disappearing but rather undergoing a metamorphosis: the religious impulse is no longer focused on an otherworldly or heavenly authority but on entities within the immanence of world history.⁶⁰

57 The following paragraphs are based entirely on the dissertation written by Govert Buijs in 1998 on the work of Eric Voegelin.

58 Since the Second World War, there have been several authors who have made the workings of a totalitarian ideology the subject of their novels. Penetrating examples include *The Gulag Archipelago* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1974) and *Life and Fate* by Vasily Grossman (1959). The latter shows how both Russian communism and German national socialism demanded the 'inner' surrender of their supporters.

59 Buijs 1998, p. 21-22, 49, 57, 217-218.

60 Buijs 1998, p. 39-43, 121-123, 169, 183, 391-392.

Voegelin thus argues that the political realm possesses a religious dimension. The totalitarian state considered itself a 'sacred community' in which the divine assignment is replaced by a 'historical task'. The Kingdom of God was transformed into a 'millennial kingdom', with a community of believers resurrected within the 'national community'. Evil continued to surface in its old forms of temptation, although they now took historical and political forms. Partly for this reason, a purely moral rejection of ideologies such as Nazism or communism is inadequate, as this does not sufficiently recognise the fact that evil can operate as an independent force in history. Those who examine why totalitarianism has had so much appeal must realise that evil can be tempting to a certain extent and can indeed enchant citizens. This is precisely what happened on a large scale in the first half of the twentieth century: the antithesis between God and the Devil left the transcendent realm and returned in a tangible, worldly form. Although Voegelin's theory primarily refers to the drama of the 1930s, the scope of his work goes beyond this time period. A characteristic of modernity is that we project the inner struggle between Good and Evil onto the outside world, where it assumes the form of political conflicts. Voegelin himself, however, was of the opinion that the transcendent and the immanent realms never merge. From time to time, the immanent realm opens up and a transcendent power is felt. It is in these moments that the existing political establishment collapses. All those involved notice that there is a tension between the truth that people experience in their inner self and that which they were led to believe.⁶¹ This underscores the fact that Voegelin's work encompasses not only an analytical scope but also a moral one.

This transcendent facet of states or political processes may well have become weaker in the second half of the twentieth century. This is the conclusion of *La religion dans la démocratie* by the historian Marcel Gauchet. Through his research into the fluctuating relations between religion and politics in French history, he discovered a fundamental change in the last decades of the twentieth century. For a long time, the state was able to see itself in moral terms. This was already the case in the early modern period, when Europe struggled with major religious conflicts. Public peace could only be preserved because the state extracted itself from the conflicts and subjugated all religious parties to its authority. This subjugation was also the crux of modern political thought as articulated by Grotius, Hobbes and Spinoza. The result was that, in the course of the nineteenth century, an almost complete separation of church and state came about. A public

61 Buijs 1998, p. 115-120, 221-227, 362-363, 392-393.

sphere developed in which religious considerations were given limited space. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, people began to realise that politics had taken on a moral character precisely due to the radical separation of church and state. In France, the Dreyfus affair made clear to everyone that the republican state was postulating a number of moral principles. Only then did the state have the intellectual, moral and spiritual authority to win the support of a large number of citizens. From that moment onwards, politics often operated as a secular religion – by clinging to the promise of salvation but knowing that this could only be achieved in a secular manner.⁶²

On this front, remarkable changes took place after the Second World War. From the 1960s, the transcendent nature of politics increasingly began to erode. The bankruptcy of political ideologies such as fascism and communism undermined any attempt to sacralise history. Politics began to lose its moral calling, and the state no longer felt it could ask sacrifices of its citizens for the public good. What then developed was a secular politics that in no way referred to heaven or salvation. Political struggle was no longer a matter of unconditional devotion. The state gave the impression that it was nothing more than a giant apparatus standing still that no longer knew what it should administer or where it should go. In the background, the growing importance of the market economy and neoliberalism also contributed to this trend. From the 1980s, all forms of collective identity seemed to disintegrate. The vertical thinking of the industrial society gave way to horizontal networks, while across the board, civil society pushed for self-regulation and autonomy. In the most wide-ranging sectors of life – from political elections to the way in which one chose one's sexual partner – market mechanisms began to take hold. As a result, a giant step was taken from a political culture in which self-interest had to be relinquished when serving the public good to one based on the tacit mandate to safeguard one's private interests.⁶³ This spelled nothing less than the end of Politics with a capital 'P' and its counterpart, the politicisation of the personal sphere.

All this raises the question whether moral engagement ceased to exist during this period. It may well have simply moved from the political sphere to another part of public life. This was an idea put forward by Michel Maffesoli, who wrote that, following the cultural changes that took place in the 1960s in the West, new communities were created whose members pursued the same lifestyle. The resilience of these groups rested on sharing

62 Gauchet 2006, p. 38-39, 57-58, 63-72.

63 Gauchet 2006, p. 30-33, 38, 77-80, 96-97, 111, 123.

concrete experiences and providing help on a mundane level. These groups – also called ‘tribes’ by Maffesoli – created a form of commonplace transcendence that was sorely missing in the business world and in public life. This explains why these groups have expressed great interest in the esoteric, particularly in Asian traditions, which have always given less emphasis to human reason and more to registering vital or life-sustaining experiences.⁶⁴ More and more citizens began to appreciate the opposite of the urban existence, committing themselves to nature conservation and improving animal welfare, for example. Incidentally, this commitment to protect did not necessarily pertain to things that were vulnerable: appreciating the vital aspects of our lives can just as well mean that one follows a healthy lifestyle. It is no coincidence that interest in vegetarianism or natural food has increased in recent decades. The number of people actively involved in sports has also grown. Many embrace the combination of a healthy body, an attractive appearance and a vital aura.⁶⁵ Although self-interest plays a prominent role in this lifestyle, it would be incorrect to assume that the ethical dimension is completely missing. One can see these efforts to maintain a physically active, healthy and natural lifestyle as the preeminent incarnation of moral commitment.

7 Solidarity at the local level

However one chooses to interpret the history of the transcendent over the last few centuries, the impression one gets is that its connection with this life on earth is becoming increasingly stronger. This started in the early modern period when moral ideals were applied to professional life, married life and political life. It continued with the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century when the state and politics became a highly moral affair. In summary, one could say that since the Middle Ages our moral sentiments have come to be increasingly dominated by social values, just as they had been determined by sacred values in an earlier phase. This discussion is, however, limited to the qualitative development that our morality has undergone. We also want to highlight a second, more quantitative development, namely the broadening of the scope of altruistic behaviour in recent centuries.

64 Maffesoli 1996, p. X-XI, 4-13, 17-25, 32-35, 40-44, 67, 73-74, 78-81, 83-85.

65 See chapter 4, sections 2 and 3.

To illustrate, we take the case of poverty relief in the Netherlands. Until recently, social security had largely been organised via the welfare state. But this had not always been the case.⁶⁶ For many centuries, the government played no significant role in poor relief, in fact it was delegated to local governments. In the Middle Ages, charity was primarily a matter for the church. Many monasteries cared for the sick or infirm, offered temporary shelter for the homeless and distributed bread to the poor on religious holidays. When population pressures in the countryside increased in the twelfth century and many poor people left for the cities, it became clear that this type of care had to be extended. As a result, the number of charities increased, and new kinds of charities were created. One example was the so-called Tables of the Holy Ghost: parish organisations for poverty relief that were managed by laymen. This configuration – in which solidarity was primarily a matter for individual believers or citizens – continued until the sixteenth century. In the centuries that followed, the government began to take on an active role. It did so in a dual move: it began to ban, chase away or lock up the dissolute poor such as beggars and tramps, and at the same time it established organisations that took care of the virtuous poor in every city, parish or municipality.⁶⁷ This put the responsibility for care in the hands of the local community, while the provision of such care was made subject to government rules.⁶⁸

This picture is consistent with the situation depicted by Arie van Deursen of the seventeenth-century village of Graft in North Holland. In his view, care for the poor and weak members of society was the purest touchstone of a community's solidarity. This does not alter the fact that care for the poor was a heavy burden and that people always had to use the scarce

66 We write 'until recently' because the arrangement of the welfare state had not been seriously questioned in the past half century. This has begun to change in recent years. Driven by constantly rising costs but also by the increased ability of many citizens to arrange their own care, the idea of a 'participatory society' has recently emerged. This idea implies that the organisation of care no longer occurs at the national level but at the local level. These proposals have, however, caused much disagreement because many suspect that the government simply wants to cut back on spending.

67 Roebroek & Hertogh 1998, p. 25, 27-35.

68 In our research into the modernisation of rural life, we saw that this dual policy with respect to the poor was indeed being pursued. Thus in the eighteenth century, many beggars, thieves, disabled soldiers and villains roamed around, armed with guns, knives or sticks and putting pressure on the more well-to-do. The government responded with punishments in the form of flogging or branding and regularly organised manhunts. The attitude towards needy inhabitants of one's own village, however, was much milder. Virtually every town had a fund for the poor. While poor people from the 'outside' were chased away, most people continued to show a basic form of commitment to one's 'own' poor people (Van den Brink 1996a, p. 256-260).

resources they had with prudence. Three guidelines were followed. First, the charity was selective: not every needy person could count on help. Strangers or those who had only lived in Graft for a short time were not given support. Second, the aid was in the form of goods. The poor received bread, peat, salted meat and sometimes some clothes or footwear, but they never received money. Third, the provision of aid was necessarily monitored. This was not unreasonable, according to Van Deursen, because caring for the poor was a heavy burden for the community. Consequently, safeguards were put in place to reduce the risk of someone abusing the system. Within these restrictions, a basic form of social engagement was upheld that was tied to the local rather than the ecclesiastical domain. Although solidarity between fellow believers was crucial for each denomination, in the case of charity it was the villagers to whom one turned. Whoever was in a situation of need could rely on everyone's help, not just those of a fellow believer. This was the case not only for the poor but also for sailors who ended up in prison in North Africa, for example. It was not the rich members of the church community but the wealthy from the village who provided bail for their freedom. The example of Graft thus shows that local solidarity was more important than religious solidarity.⁶⁹

8 Solidarity at the national level

The idea that poverty relief was a task for the local community, with philanthropy playing a fundamental role, remained intact until the end of the eighteenth century. It was only during the Batavian Republic that people began advocating a more active role for the national government. Public employment projects could be established in order to reduce the number of those in poverty. Although the pleas for the formation of work institutions, the establishment of work colonies or the promotion of public works such as land reclamation and the construction of waterways were heard again and again throughout the nineteenth century, these ideas were rarely implemented.⁷⁰ Private or religious charity took care of the majority of poverty relief, which meant that there was no need for the state to be involved. Until well into the nineteenth century, private, religious and in some cases also civil organisations resisted all attempts by the central government to strengthen its influence in this area, leading to the

69 Van Deursen 1994, p. 211, 218-219, 313-316.

70 Kloek & Mijnhart 2001.

failure of several interior ministers to tighten their control over existing institutions.⁷¹ The same inaction on the part of the government could be seen with the issue of children working in factories. Despite increasing pressure from society to do something about industrial squalor, quite some time passed before the government took action. It was only around 1870 that public pressure became so intense that a shift took place. A coalition was formed of progressive-liberal politicians, organised workers and socially conscious employers who felt that the state should do something about social injustices. In the wake of this, various laws were enacted at the end of the nineteenth century with the aim of reducing the risks of poverty and other adversities. Slowly but surely, people switched from thinking in terms of 'support' to thinking in terms of 'insurance', although the exact nature of that insurance (voluntary or mandatory) still led to substantial differences in opinion.⁷²

Although the emergence of social politics in the nineteenth century has often been described, little attention has been paid to the moral sensibilities that play a role in this. An exception is Hanneke Hoekstra. Her research shows how nineteenth-century citizens began to think about the world in a different manner due to the influence of newspapers and novels. The social drama in the works of Charles Dickens, Elisabeth Gaskell or Gustave Flaubert meant that people could empathise more with the living conditions of others. The suffering described by these authors did not lead immediately to action, but the result was that citizens became more sensitive to the plight of paupers, orphans, the sick, criminals and prostitutes.⁷³ A new picture of the world emerged that had major consequences in the long run. A clear example is the campaign against slavery, which took on new momentum after *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852. The story of a mother who risked losing her child made a deeper impression than all the anonymous reports about slaves who were victims of exploitation and abuse. The novel depicted human suffering and the injustice and cruelty of slavery in a penetrating manner.⁷⁴ The same sort of thing occurred in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when the plight of factory workers came under the

71 This is reflected in the new Poor Law of 1854, which formulated the principle of 'absolute inevitability'. This principle meant that the central government could act only in the direst case, that is, when no other organisation offered a solution.

72 Roebroek & Hertogh 1998, p. 94-101, 153-157.

73 Hoekstra 2005, p. 8-10.

74 This was part of a general change in mentality in the US and England in which women were very active. It appealed to a morality in which the ethics of sacrifice played a major role (referring to the death of Christ on the cross). According to the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the

spotlight. Testimonials of exploitation or poverty and reports detailing the miserable conditions under which children worked in factories spurred the upper class to do something to curb the harmful effects of industrialisation.

This gives the impression that there was a nationwide consensus at the beginning of the twentieth century on how to care for the poor and those in need. In reality, there were three opposing political currents. The first current, espoused by conservative liberals and politicians, was based on the principle of full state abstention. The second current, propagated by Catholic and Protestant politicians, argued that the state should only intervene if social actors such as employers and workers failed to step in. The Protestants invoked the principle of 'sovereignty', while the Catholics referred to the principle of 'subsidiarity', but both argued for a balance between private and public initiatives.⁷⁵ The third current, defended by progressive liberals and social democrats, advocated active intervention by the state. Dutch politics was stuck in a certain stalemate in the first decades of the twentieth century. According to Roebroek and Hertogh, this was primarily due to the fact that social democrats and progressive liberals had formed a relatively strong power bloc, while faith-based organisations within civil society still had little influence. The stalemate was only broken towards the end of the First World War, when the principle of subsidiarity was increasingly adhered to. As a consequence, from the 1920s, processes of societal organisation were largely determined by a denominational approach.⁷⁶

In the period up to 1945, another dual movement took place in the field of social policy. The national government unveiled more initiatives, and social expenditure rose significantly. The number of insured increased sharply: while only 30 percent of the labour force was insured in 1920, by 1945 this percentage had risen to 65. The amount of expenditure on social policies as a percentage of the national budget increased accordingly. At the same time, most support could in fact be attributed to local activities. Building on traditions from the pre-modern era, municipalities and businesses organised support for the sick and the unemployed in the interbellum period. The evolving system of social insurance simply existed alongside

abolition of slavery required a moral conversion to take place in people's hearts (Hoekstra 2005, p. 91-94).

75 The principle of 'sovereignty' refers to the idea that society consists of multiple spheres such as economic life, family life, etc., each with their own type of authority which thereby prevented the development of absolute control by the state. The principle of 'subsidiarity' refers to the idea that lower and higher authorities have different tasks and that decisions should be taken at the lowest possible level in order to prevent the development of absolute control by the state.

76 Roebroek & Hertogh 1998, p. 162-167.

traditional forms of poor relief. While local governments and private institutions spent a total of 260 million guilders in 1935, the expenditure on social insurance did not exceed 120 million guilders. This illustrates that in the balance between society and state, the scales had not yet tipped in favour of the state. While it is true that pleas for more government intervention gained momentum, as was apparent by the Labour Plan with which the social democrats proposed to tackle the 1930s crisis, these pleas were more focused on the details of the existing arrangement rather than on a new system in which the state would fulfill a central role.⁷⁷

9 Solidarity at the global level

It was only after the Second World War that a real change – in several respects – took place in the constellation described above. To begin with, the legal basis for the system of social insurance was expanded. Without any fundamental debates having taken place, the system shifted from one that offered insurance for certain groups of employees to a national social security system offering all citizens a basic form of social security. Furthermore, public expenditure on social security increased steadily until the end of the 1970s, not only in absolute but also in relative terms: while in 1950, social security spending represented only 10 percent of gross domestic product, by around 1980 this percentage had risen to 30. The number of citizens entitled to benefits also rose: while there were some 500,000 welfare recipients in the Netherlands around 1950, 25 years later this number had spiked to more than 2.6 million. The influence of the national government, moreover, continued to expand. Eventually, a new and truly national arrangement of mutual support was created. At first glance, this appears to correspond with the principle of central planning that the social democrats had advocated. But a closer analysis shows that subsidiarity remained the decisive principle. Only in exceptional situations was the government prepared to intervene and private actors willing to step aside. And as soon as forces within civil society had sufficient potential, the government limited itself to a facilitating role. Roebroek and Hertogh thus consider social policy shaped in the period after the Second World War to be a denominational success.⁷⁸

77 Roebroek & Hertogh 1998, p. 248, 253-256, 261-263.

78 Roebroek & Hertogh 1998, p. 345-351, 356-359, 369, 433-434.

As is well known, towards the end of the 1970s, this success began to reach its limits. More and more European countries began to realise that they could no longer afford the welfare state in its contemporary form. This resulted in numerous attempts since the beginning of the 1980s to cut back on expenditure. Gradually a new conception emerged in which the central role of the welfare state (as a mechanism for redistributing income) was maintained but whereby the emphasis shifted to one of activating citizens: they had to put in more effort than before into receiving benefits.⁷⁹ Yet this shift in policy did not lead to citizens only engaged with their immediate surroundings. In fact, rather than becoming smaller, the circle of moral engagement began to expand. From the 1960s onwards, new forms of solidarity emerged throughout Europe that were international and even global in nature. We are referring not only to the many movements supporting oppressed people and helping victims of natural disasters or famine but also the organisations standing up for human rights or freedom of expression under dictatorships as well as movements warning against the dangers of pollution or nuclear energy, foundations that raise money for victims of civil wars, and charities that deploy relief supplies and medical staff to places in the world in most dire need of them. In all their diversity, these initiatives constitute an impressive palette of philanthropy that goes far beyond the borders of a national community. They prove that, nowadays, forms of altruistic behaviour can be, and are, extended throughout the entire world.

This development did not, of course, appear out of thin air but is directly related to the spectacular changes that society has gone through. It also parallels the past: in the nineteenth century, the emergence of a sense of national unity stemmed partly from the development of railways, newspapers, schools and other facilities that created a bond between citizens living in different parts of the country.⁸⁰ A similar phenomenon occurred in the past half century on a global scale, allowing supranational forms of solidarity to flourish. International trade flows have increased in volume and intensity, while new means of communication have conquered the world and brought groups together that had until then always worked independently of each other.⁸¹ Given this background, it is not surprising that a new moral awareness is growing and that many parties (from

79 Roebroek & Hertogh 1998, p. 433-441, 449-450, 458.

80 This process of unification is aptly described in Van der Woud 2008. An earlier description can be found in Knippenberg & De Pater 1988. Comparable processes occurred in France, as described in Weber 1977.

81 Although this development had been going on for much longer, it was only a few decades ago that it became the subject of debate. With the collapse of communism in 1989 and the rapid

government leaders to journalists, from consumers to climate activists) are trying to influence global opinion. What is at play here are not only new forms of moral engagement but also new themes. Attention is shifting to that which binds people – across various continents with diverse interests and diverse cultures – together.⁸² One such binding factor can be found in the major challenges the world is facing in the areas of nature and the environment – problems that, given the nature of the issue, cannot be managed at the national level. But it could also be challenges in the moral and philosophical field, such as democratic freedoms and respect for human rights. Yet again, we find that there is an intimate connection between the bodily and spiritual dimensions of our existence and that the dialectical tension between power and morality remains an importance driving force.⁸³

10 Conclusions

In the first chapter, we argued that the process of modernisation presupposes a cultural substratum consisting of the many values, habits, ideas and routines that emerged in the pre-modern period and that often extend far back into history. We focused on moral values because – as we saw in Adam Smith's work – they have their own dynamic and cannot be easily incorporated into the pursuit of modernisation. But we did not say anything in the first chapter about the composition of that moral heritage, which is why this chapter is devoted to what we believe to be the main elements of that heritage. We offer our apologies for any inaccuracies or errors in our presumptuous attempt to discuss whole cultural histories in the space of a few pages. We simply wanted to introduce the cultural substratum that was already present before modernisation and that went through a number of dramatic changes as modern society developed. Looking back, we can discern three discrete types of values: vital (in the sense of life-sustaining), religious and social values. These represent three layers, so to speak, that were deposited in different eras but that are still with us today. We can imagine their relationship as a kind of sedimentation, where an earlier layer is covered by a later one but without the earlier layer disappearing. What, briefly, do these values boil down to?

spread of information technology in the 1990s, the idea arose that we would quickly converge towards a single, shared economic world order (Held & McGrew 2003, p.1-8, 32-39).

82 Norris 2003, Stuurman 2010, p. 372-504.

83 Singer 2004, p. 3-12, 64-65, 130-149, 160-164, 170-171.

The first layer includes a number of life-sustaining (or vital) values that are the product of our evolutionary history and that stem from the fact that we form a community. Frans de Waal considers the ability to act morally to be present in our nature. Humans are subject to two opposing tendencies: self-interest, selfishness and rivalry versus mutual support, engagement and cooperation. Human society is determined by a mix of competition and cooperation – as is the case with other animals that live in groups. This means that our moral behaviour has a biological dimension to it. Animals that live in groups are highly capable of resolving conflicts. They are even capable of moving on to reconciliation after violent fights. The inclination to do so is stronger the closer the relationship is between the animals involved in the conflict. The inclination to help the other increases if there is a genetic relationship between those involved. The greater the genetic distance, the less the inclination to help. This is also undeniably true for people. Our sympathies extend most easily to our family members, somewhat less so to members of our group, and hardly at all to strangers. In addition, there must be a certain degree of empathy. This means that one can put oneself in another's shoes and take into account the feelings of another in a spontaneous manner. The human face plays an important role in this interaction. With our mirror neurons, we observe the intentions behind someone's words and behaviour. Subconsciously, we continuously ask ourselves what the other person is aiming at, while the other is doing the same with us. The result is that – as Adam Smith already suspected – empathy is constantly being employed in everyday society. Generally speaking, this capacity for empathy is found more often in women than in men. This is because females are the primary caretakers of our young children, both among people and among primates. They have a better antenna for emotional signals. This does not mean that man is the complete antithesis of woman: for both genders, there is a certain distribution in the capacity for empathy.

In the second layer, we have religious values. These refer to ideals that only exist in the human imagination and that have been articulated by religious traditions since the Axial Age. In terms of substance, there is a clear overlap between these religious traditions, which all advocate virtues such as compassion, love of one's neighbour and mutual respect. There are, however, significant differences in the way each religion handles the tension between these ideals and everyday reality. In sections 2 to 5, we examined how the West has dealt with this tension between the transcendent and immanent orders. We discussed Eisenstadt's theory, which holds that the search for a connection between these two orders can be traced all the way back to Biblical times. This was the case at the beginning of the Christian

calendar era, when rabbis developed the idea that God was at work in all the details of daily life. After the destruction of the Second Temple, pious Jews were encouraged to construct a new temple: when they entered the synagogue to sing and pray together, God would already be in their midst. Influential rabbis declared that the spirit rather than the letter of the Torah was more important. The crucial thing was to love one's neighbour. This is consistent with the story of Jesus as told by the four evangelists. Jesus not only preached that one should love one's neighbour, he also embodied this principle. The story of his life and death is as personal as it is demonstrative, which is why it appealed to so many people from the outset. His inspiring role was to be codified a few centuries later in the doctrine of the incarnation of God. From that moment on, the link between the transcendent and the immanent order was theologically established. This new faith expanded significantly, because anyone who followed the example of Christ could join the community of believers. At the same time, the church took on a dual nature, which would characterise its conduct for many centuries. The church had on the one hand a political and legal structure borrowed from the Roman Empire, and on the other hand a moral responsibility that was difficult to reconcile with the exercise of power. The ambiguity of its history has often been the subject of criticism and ridicule. This is understandable, given that the church has so often allowed itself to be drawn into doing things that are objectionable from the perspective of the commandment to love one's neighbour. And yet we must not ignore the fact that, in this way, Christianity has continued to pass on the challenging idea of the incarnation of God.⁸⁴ In any case, the church has contributed significantly to the dialectic of morality and power that has propelled our way of thinking in West Europe. A defining characteristic of this movement is the permanent search for a way to convert moral values into secular behaviour, while an excess of power and wealth is criticised on moral grounds.⁸⁵

The third layer contains social values, which developed in the early modern period and are closely linked to the demands that urban society places on human conduct. A religious Reformation took place – as described by Charles Taylor – that gave a higher moral status to ordinary life. From that moment on, spiritual salvation no longer came about in an indirect way (i.e., via the church) but had to be realised at the level of everyday life. The result was that moral demands were placed not only on one's religious life but also

84 Vattimo 1998, p. 10-15, 22-23, 30-42, 60-63, 79.

85 In this light, the concept of 'incarnation' takes on new meaning. It refers to the task of realising an element of the divine here on earth (cf. Hick 2005, p. 98-149 and Ferry 1998).

on one's professional life, marriage life and public life. The craftsman had to do his work with due diligence, the husband devoted himself to affection, and charity was recognised by the public sector as a virtue. This led to an ambiguous development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On the one hand, there were those who saw the realisation of moral values as a social mission. They believed that if morality must assume a social form, they must work towards a better society. On the other hand, there were also tendencies that pointed to a certain moralisation of the public domain. The argument was that if living together in a community is a moral matter, then we need to strengthen the idealistic side of the fatherland, the state or political enterprise. Incidentally, the relationship between these two tendencies (which had been at odds with one another for a long time) appears to be changing at the moment. While politics is losing its transcendent dimension, interest in moral and religious values in society is making a cautious revival. We do not know how this will end, of course, but there is a widely shared hunch that we are on the cusp of a new chapter in our history.

Figure 2.1 Types of moral engagement – understood as specific combinations of scale (horizontal) and normative domain (vertical)

	Micro	Meso	Macro
Social	Brotherhood	Professionalism	Society
Religious	Spirituality	Democracy	Humanity
Vital	Intimacy	Lifestyles	Naturalism

Although the distinction we make between the three types of values is rather sketchy, it can be of help in our attempt to map out the different forms of moral engagement. In order to do this, we link the types of engagement with the scales of engagement. In the sections above, we distinguished between the local, national and global levels and argued that the circle

of altruistic behaviour has increasingly widened in the course of history. Combining both the types of values and the scales they operate on results in a matrix that brings some order to the various forms of engagement that occur in modern societies. The idea is that each combination of value and scale corresponds with a specific form of engagement. In theory, therefore, there can be nine different forms of engagement, as figure 2.1 demonstrates. Drawing on the ideas we put forward earlier, we want to briefly explain what these forms are. This gives us a theoretical framework that will be helpful in the following, more empirical chapters that examine the state of affairs from a moral perspective in the Netherlands.

Let us begin with the forms of moral engagement at the micro level. We have seen that West Europe has a long history of members of local communities assisting one another in times of need. This is a form of *brotherhood* or love for one's neighbour that has existed already since the Middle Ages. The welfare state may be considered a national version of this type of solidarity, but meanwhile all kinds of local assistance and volunteering survived. The second form of moral commitment at the micro level is *spiritualism*. Since the Reformation, an individual's relationship with God has become a personal affair, not only among Protestants but also Catholics. This applies even more to modern believers, who consider the divine a strictly personal experience. Finally, *intimacy* also belongs to this level. From the early modern period, more attention came to be given to mutual love, affection and care. This devotion manifested itself in the relationship between spouses as well as between parents and children.

How does our moral engagement take shape at the macro level? One way is by working to improve the society as a whole or to help specific groups struck by adversity. A classic example is what happened at the end of the nineteenth century when wealthy citizens took to heart the plight of children working in factories. Other examples include the pursuit of an entirely new society by revolutionaries or political reformers' aims to improve the existing system. We could summarise these efforts as a commitment to *society*, as they are strongly related to social values and social engagement. If we look instead at life-sustaining values, the protection of nature and the environment stands out. While our sensitivity to nature goes back to the eighteenth century, today this engagement has global traits, as the problems in this field cannot be resolved at the local or national levels. Apart from questions of scale, we are dealing here with a philosophical tradition called *naturalism* that stands in opposition to religious ideas and tries to understand human life through our experiences as natural beings. Another form of moral engagement is protecting human rights and standing up for

human dignity. In modern societies, this type of engagement is seen not only within governments or among policymakers but also among individual citizens, who often fight against the government on this issue (*humanity*).

And finally, we come to the question of how moral sentiments manifest themselves at the intermediate level. This could be, for example, the way citizens devote themselves to their country. We explained above that the national cause has a number of quasi-religious features, which result in many subjects being prepared to sacrifice their private interests for the public good. This is certainly true of the totalitarian ideologies that flourished in the first half of the twentieth century, which combined moral engagement with political action. This quasi-religious aspect can also be seen in any kind of political engagement that does not take on a totalitarian form: principles such as the rule of law and *democracy* are experienced as de facto transcendent values, something that rises above social and political reality. After all, the state has acted as the guardian of public order since the early modern period. And yet it would be incorrect to say that morality at the intermediate level can be confined to the state. In our professional lives, for example, we witness an increasing sensibility to the normative dimensions of work, with the result that moral engagement has become a more permanent aspect of *professionalism*. The same can be said about the way we shape our *lifestyles* nowadays, although the moral dimension seems to be much more related to vital values than to values in the religious or political sphere in this case.

This chapter has explored from a theoretical perspective the many ways in which modern citizens configure their moral engagement. For the remainder of this book, we reveal which of these forms are put into practice by Dutch citizens as well as the corresponding trends that can be observed.

Part 2

3 The Netherlands as a liquid society

Gabriël van den Brink

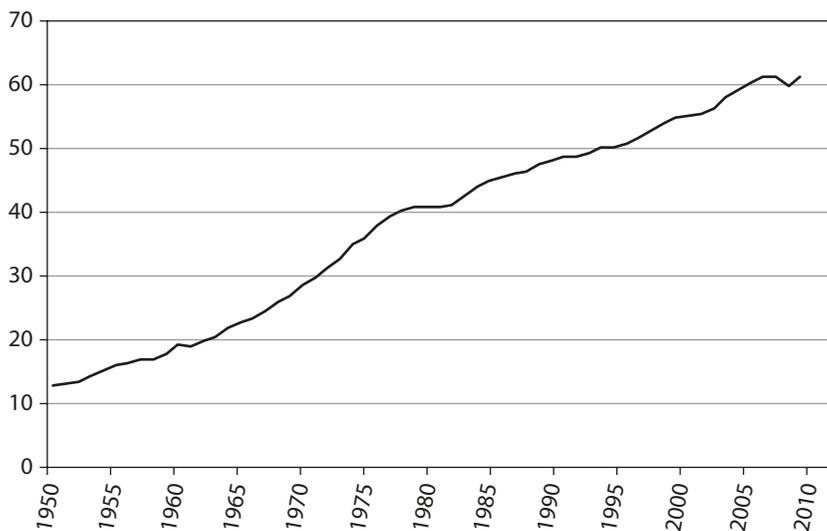
In this chapter, we describe how the modernisation process has unfolded in the last half century in the Netherlands. This should clarify how modern ideals such as truth, equality and efficiency work in society. It goes without saying that such an outline must be succinct, not only because the space we have here is limited for analysing such a complex process but also because we did not set out to write a historical account. We limit ourselves to several main points, with the definition of modernity that we established earlier as our starting point. We aim to achieve two things in this chapter. First, it would help to explain to our non-Dutch readers what epitomises modern-day Dutch society. Without such an explanation, the rest of our argument would be incomprehensible. Second, we would like to bring a number of basic data together in order to test a suspicion that we formulated earlier, namely that the modernisation of a society gives rise to certain risks or even disadvantages for the preservation of moral sensitivity. This last point is something we will address extensively in chapter 4.

We start with a few main points regarding the economic, political and intellectual development of the Netherlands. Although we will regularly be making use of time series, our research is not meant to be quantitative. We merely want to highlight certain qualitative changes that took place in economic life (section 1), political life (section 2) and cultural life (section 3) after the Second World War. We analyse what type of society these changes have produced. In our opinion, important characteristics of modern society include the gradual rise in expectations (section 4), the declining significance of institutional frameworks (section 5) and an increase in social mobility (section 6). We then point out the consequences of these trends for the Dutch population. We examine, for example, the modernisation of family life (section 7), public life (section 8) and professional life (section 9).

1 Economic modernisation

One of the most striking aspects of the post-WWII economic development of the Netherlands (and other Western countries) is, of course, the continual rise in the level of prosperity. Economists and historians to this day are still struggling to come up with an explanation for this phenomenon. Is

Graph 3.1 GDP (in 2013 US dollars and adjusted for inflation) per hour worked in the Netherlands



Source: The Conference Board Total Economy Database™ (January 2014)

economic growth an autonomous development, i.e., does the production of wealth occur more or less automatically once it is initiated? Or does growth presuppose the existence of certain non-economic factors such as political or cultural conditions?¹ For the time being, we assume that economic growth and the emergence of a modern society influence each other.² This point of view is partly rooted in the way the Dutch economy has developed in the last half century.

In any case, Dutch gross domestic product (GDP) per capita rose from around 11,000 US dollars at the beginning of the 1950s to 44,000 US dollars in 2010.³ This increase cannot be attributed to the fact that Dutch

1 See the discussion on this matter in 2008 in the *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* (*Journal for Social and Economic History*, vol 2, p. 87-162), in particular the contribution by Jan Luiten van Zanden and the literature cited by him. Authors who have recently given their views on this theme include Douglass (1981), Landes (1998), Tilly (1990), 't Hart (1993), Fukuyama (1995) and Mokyr (2002). Authors who discuss the Netherlands more specifically and its history include Davids et al. (1988) and De Moor & Van Zanden (2010).

2 This belief is based on research we conducted into the modernisation of everyday life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Van den Brink 1996a). It also provides a good starting point for research into the recent history of living together in a community (Van den Brink 2007a).

3 Converted to 2013 prices and based on the Conference Board Total Economy Database (<http://www.conference-board.org/data/economydatabase/>) accessed on 2-6-2014.

employees worked more, because the average number of hours worked actually decreased – from 2,300 hours per year immediately after the war to approximately 1,380 hours now.⁴ The increase in the level of prosperity can primarily be attributed to the increase in labour productivity. To illustrate, we refer to graph 3.1, which shows an almost continuous growth in productivity, measured as the GDP per hour worked.⁵

This increase went hand in hand with two other changes seen in the Dutch economy in this period. First, the focus of business activity shifted as services became increasingly important. At the beginning of the 1960s, the industrial sector provided for almost half of all employment in the Netherlands. This was a time when textile mills, shipyards and large companies in the electrical engineering and chemical industries had work for millions of people. This type of employment started to decline from the beginning of the 1960s. Some companies moved their production abroad (usually to countries where labour costs were much lower than in the Netherlands), while other companies simply stopped their activities. Parallel to this, the services sector began to grow significantly. This sector includes not only services in the business world (trade, hospitality, banking, financial services, etc.) but also the wide range of services that we regard as the public sector (education, healthcare, security, public administration, etc.). The services sector grew so rapidly that by 2010 it was responsible for 80 percent of employment in the Netherlands.⁶ Partly as a result, interpersonal aspects of work became increasingly important. While traditional industry tends to revolve around resources, machines and tangible products, the services sector relies much more on personal relations, communications and individual needs.

The second change has to do with the international orientation of the Dutch economy. This is something that has a long history extending back to the seventeenth century when the Dutch Republic was a world power due to its wealth, trade networks and military presence. In later centuries, the Netherlands was forced to abandon much of its influence, while the last remnant of its colonial power was dismantled after the Second World War.⁷ Nonetheless, this international orientation of Dutch businesses continued and indeed was further enhanced by the forces of globalisation in the course of the twentieth century. Between 1950 and 1990, the total value of all Dutch

4 The Conference Board Total Economy Database™ (<http://www.conference-board.org/data/economydatabase/>) accessed on 2-6-2014.

5 Kalshoven 2014, p. 44-55; see also p. 77-105.

6 CBS Statline (dd 22-4-2013).

7 De Rooy 2002, p. 195 e.v.

imports and exports increased. From 1990, this development has accelerated, resulting in an extraordinary intensity in the exchange of goods, services and capital. This has brought both advantages and disadvantages with it. One advantage is that the economy has been able to benefit substantially from international trade. A disadvantage is that fluctuations in business cycles have had a relatively strong effect on the Netherlands. All things considered, it would appear that the Netherlands is a highly modern society in this regard. The country has an internationally oriented, innovative economy that is among the top European economies in terms of efficiency.⁸

2 Political modernisation

While the business world was driven by the pursuit of efficiency, Dutch politics devoted itself after the end of the Second World War to freedom and equality. Until the 1960s, Dutch citizens would have considered it almost unthinkable to question parliamentary democracy – with memories of the German dictatorship still fresh in people’s minds and the spectre of a communist dictatorship looming over the continent. All parties in the Netherlands abided by the constitution and parliamentary methods. Although violent extra-parliamentary actions took place in later years, these were not of an anti-democratic nature.

The embrace of democratic values went further than politics in the narrow sense of the word. The pursuit of democratisation – which took place everywhere in the West from the 1960s – had a strong impact on the Netherlands. Even at the level of the household, there was a transition from a command-oriented structure to one based on negotiation, as sociologist Bram de Swaan has pointed out.⁹ Towards the end of the 1960s, traditional forms of authority came into disrepute across society. All people in positions of authority – from mayors to professors, from conductors to bishops, from museum directors to police commissioners – came under fire. Subordinates rebelled against hierarchical relationships and demanded a say in matters. Everyone from students to city dwellers, members of orchestras, believers, artists and regular citizens considered themselves quite capable of assessing policy, if not determining it. Although many activists from that period would beg to differ, this movement was on the whole successful.¹⁰ In numerous

8 WRR 2013, p. 37-71.

9 De Swaan 1979, p. 81-115.

10 Tonkens 1999, p. 241-242.

sectors, hierarchical patterns made way for more egalitarian forms of interaction. The premise now is consultation and negotiation on the basis of equality, and the democratic culture associated with this is now so broadly shared that most Dutch citizens can be described as liberals in the socio-political sense.

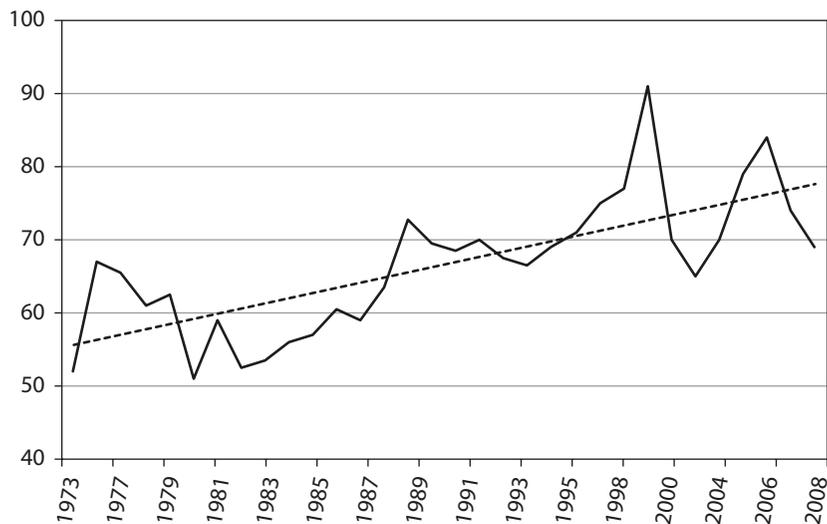
Given this background, it is not surprising that citizens have developed more interest in politics over the years. While in 1970, 35 percent had a (strong) interest in the political issues of the day, by 2010 that share had risen to 57 percent of all respondents. Moreover, more and more citizens sympathise with those who strive for certain aims outside of existing political channels, for example sit-ins to prevent an unjust law from being adopted, wildcat strikes to prevent massive layoffs, or occupations of schools by parents in protest against larger classes. In the early 1970s, less than one-third of the respondents to a survey approved of this kind of extra-parliamentary actions, but in 2009 more than two-thirds could relate to such actions.¹¹ Apart from that, the Dutch increasingly treasure their freedom of expression. They have become strongly attached to their freedom to demonstrate, to express criticism of the royal family, to publish whatever they want, to strike for higher wages and to refuse to serve in the military. According to available data, the average approval of these democratic freedoms rose from 65 percent in the mid-1960s to more than 80 percent in 2000. What also rose was the share of those who had something to say at a meeting, sent a letter to a newspaper or in some other way stood up for their opinion.¹² All this underscores a growing interest in public affairs, an increasing need to influence things outside of normal channels, and a growing appreciation of the democratic right to do so. It therefore does not surprise us that Dutch citizens' appreciation of democracy has increased steadily over the past 40 years (see graph 3.2).

This does not mean that the relationship between citizens and the government have improved – indeed, the contrary appears to be the case. We would therefore like to say a brief word about the dissatisfaction that politics has aroused in recent decades. This dissatisfaction has assumed a variety of forms in the Netherlands over the years. In the 1960s, for example, it led to the establishment of a new political party that pursued constitutional reform and that found support especially among the progressive middle class.¹³ In the 1970s, the sense of unease took on a more radical form. Numer-

11 De Hart & Dekker 2009, p. 250.

12 Van Houwelingen et al. 2011, p. 197.

13 We are talking about Politieke Partij Democraten 66, referred to as D66. This party is still represented in parliament and even increased the number of seats it holds in the 2014 elections. Especially in larger cities with many students, the party has been able to obtain a majority.

Graph 3.2 Percentage of Dutch citizens satisfied with the way democracy works

Source: Eurobarometer (dated 7-7-2015)

ous students and other youth began to organise extra-parliamentary action such as demonstrations and occupations. From these events, a number of new social movements sprouted that focused on specific themes such as poverty in the Third World, world peace, housing shortages or nuclear energy. These activists had little affinity with official politics and made this clear through their actions, which were often as large-scale as they were radical. Later, the public at large demonstrated its growing interest in these types of ideals, as evidenced by citizens' support for organisations committed to specific themes. Associations in the field of healthcare, international solidarity or nature conservation grew significantly not only in terms of their membership but also in terms of publicity.¹⁴ Donations to these types of initiatives also increased sharply. While in 1975 only 271 million guilders were donated to these kinds of organisations, twenty years later these funds had grown to 1.2 billion guilders.¹⁵ It would be incorrect to say, therefore, that social engagement has declined in recent decades. Interest in traditional political organisations may have waned, but this has been replaced by a broad interest in new forms of participation.¹⁶

14 De Hart 1999: 53-57; Dekker 2000: 65.

15 SCP 1998, p. 762.

16 De Hart 1999, p. 56-57.

3 Cultural modernisation

The intellectual changes that the Netherlands has gone through centre on the ever-growing participation in education.¹⁷ To illustrate, the share of youth who entered secondary education doubled between 1950 and 2005. This trend was particularly strong for girls, who had traditionally lagged boys in education but had gained a lead by the mid-1970s. The number of youth attending university rose even more sharply, namely by a factor of four. While in 1950 no more than 2.6 percent of students between the ages of 18 and 25 pursued a university education, this share was at 14 percent by 2005. Also on this point, girls have succeeded in overcoming the traditional gender gap.¹⁸ It is worth noting that, even as public expenditure on education began to decline from 1980, participation continued to rise (see graph 3.3). This proves that interest in education is not solely dependent on collective investment. The role played by the commitment and priorities of individual parents or guardians of children should not be underestimated. In general, parents are very aware of the fact that their children's future opportunities depend on the education they pursue. They therefore do everything in their power not only to pay for part of the costs but also to guide their children in their studies and ensure that they are well-prepared.

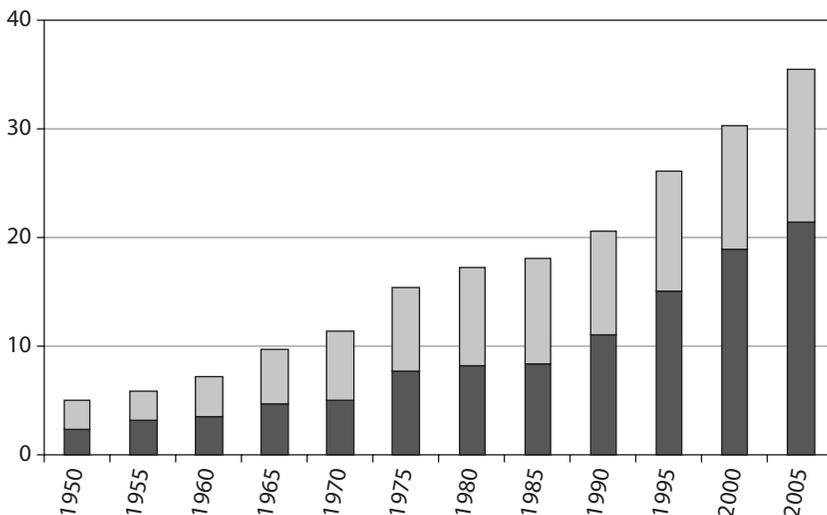
An intriguing question is how we should interpret this increased participation in education. Although we do not deny the importance of economic and political circumstances, we prefer to explain this along sociocultural lines, more specifically the social, intellectual and affective investments that one generation makes to the benefit of the next generation. This kind of investment has proven to be very profitable in the long run. Research into educational successes has repeatedly shown that the educational level of the parents is of great influence. Children of highly educated parents are more likely to have a successful educational track record than children whose parents are poorly educated.¹⁹ This is probably the result of self-reinforcing processes. Parents who have a relatively high level of cultural and intellectual capital can pass this on to their children, with the result that these children can more easily find their way to higher education. The reverse is unfortunately also true: children who come from an environment in which most people are not well-educated must overcome more obstacles in their

17 Derived from Van den Brink 2002, p. 37-39.

18 CBS Statline (dated 15-4-2013).

19 Highly educated parents are more critical of the quality of the education offered than parents with a lower education (see Bronneman & Herweijer 2002, p. 506-514).

Graph 3.3 Participation in higher professional education (dark grey) and university education (light grey)



Note: Data refer to the number of students as a percentage of their relevant age group (based on CBS Statline dated 15-4-2013).

educational years and therefore tend to underperform. This explains why education still has a selective effect and why attempts by the government to redress this situation have generally produced little result. The gap stems from the unequal distribution of cultural and intellectual capital across the population as a whole. At the same time, we can conclude that the average level of education has increased across the board over the last few decades. Even those who have had relatively little education today are still better educated than a few decades ago.

4 Higher expectations

Although it is possible to distinguish between economic, political and cultural forms of modernisation, it is evident that in reality they are continually interacting with each other. That which we call 'modern society' is the product of this complex interplay. We would therefore like to say something about this interplay. In the following sections, we discuss three phenomena that characterise modern Dutch society. One such phenomenon is the dramatic increase in mobility and the corresponding erosion of almost

all traditional institutions. But first we discuss a phenomenon that is less visible, namely the gradual rise in social expectations. In general, the term 'expectation' means that a tension exists between the desired situation and the actual situation. This tension differs depending on the domain, but in general it leads to an effort to improve the situation. Once the improvement is realised, sooner or later new expectations emerge that go beyond the improved situation. We have described this phenomenon – which is essential for a proper understanding of modern life – in an earlier publication as the upgrading of social norms.²⁰ Below, we use a few examples to show how this works.

The first example involves the demands imposed upon employees in modern society.²¹ We already mentioned that employment in the Netherlands has been shifting to the services sector, with more than 80 percent of all employees earning their income in this sector. This shift is relevant because it presupposes a certain work attitude. In the traditional agriculture and industrial sectors, endurance and physical strength played an important role, but in the modern services sector, social and communication skills are what matter. As a result, there are different requirements when recruiting new personnel. Research into job advertisements has shown that, in recent decades, employees are increasingly expected to fulfil social-normative requirements – especially qualities such as loyalty, personal initiative or the ability to work with other people. Remarkably, this trend holds not only for higher-level employees but also for lower and mid-level jobs. Essentially, the social and normative requirements have risen across the board. There is, however, a distinction: for lower-level jobs, employees often have to meet collective norms, while the requirements for higher positions have more to do with one's behaviour as an individual.²² What is relevant is that the share of higher-level jobs has risen sharply. The share of lower positions changed very little between 1960 and 1995, but that of higher-level positions rose significantly (from 15 to 37 percent), while the percentage of mid-level positions declined proportionately (from 56 to 35 percent).²³

Our second example has to do with public life in the Netherlands. Embracing the anti-authoritarian revolt of the 1960s, many citizens have developed an assertive lifestyle, by which we mean an attitude that is based largely on one's own interests, feelings, beliefs and standards. This

20 Van den Brink 2007a, p. 116-134.

21 Derived from Van den Brink 2007a, p. 121-124.

22 Moelker 1992, p. 80-81.

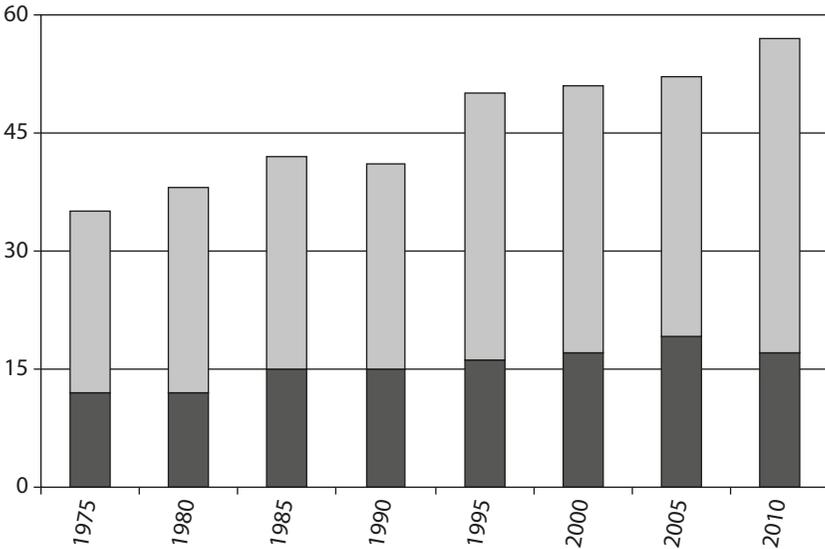
23 Van Ruyseveldt et al. 1998, p. 109.

presupposes, however, that one has the available economic or financial reserves. In that sense, we should not underestimate the significance of the rise in prosperity for large parts of the Dutch population. In addition, this lifestyle requires that one has a measure of cultural and intellectual capital. It is at the same time an attitude that requires a significant amount of freedom of movement. Assertive citizens literally take up a lot of space: they live spaciously and often travel over long distances. They also demand space in the social and affective sense of the word: they want to be heard, and they blow the whistle if too little attention is being paid to their opinion. They show signs (psychologically speaking) of a great sense of self-esteem, and they tend to assume a haughty attitude when dealing with other people. This is partly reflected in their attitude towards politicians, officials and persons of authority. Modern Dutch people immediately have their opinion ready, they want to be heard, and they do not readily resign themselves to political decisions. They are increasingly prepared to take action against laws they consider unjust, as we touched upon earlier (see graph 3.4). It is no surprise, then, that authorities who try to impose certain changes often end up disappointed. Dutch citizens like to see themselves as equal negotiating partners with those who rule. This had already been the case in the past, and in recent decades this attitude has only become stronger.

A third example of gradually increasing expectations is in the field of education.²⁴ Until the 1960s, only one-third of Dutch children went on to pursue secondary education. The vast majority began to work after finishing primary school. Since then, interest in secondary and higher education has grown continuously. We already suggested that economic or political circumstances have had little influence on this growth. The level of education of one's parents, however, does have an effect: there are more children of highly educated parents in university and higher professional education, while the parents of students in preparatory vocational training have had relatively little education. Yet it would be a mistake to attribute higher expectations only to the parents' level of ambition. The education system also contributes to this. The traditional educational method, in which all students worked on the same subject matter, has been abandoned, and more attention is now being paid to individual students and the specific difficulties or potentials they have. Moreover, the emphasis has shifted from the ready availability of knowledge to cognitive skills and the ability to work independently. As a result, the level of abstraction has risen, and good language skills have become more important. The higher level of

24 Derived from Van den Brink 2007a, p. 124-125.

Graph 3.4 Willingness to protest against a law deemed to be unjust



Note: The following question was posed: ‘How likely is it that you would actually do something if you thought that parliament was about to adopt an unjust law?’ The dark grey section of the bars show those who answered ‘very likely’ while the light grey section represent those who answered ‘somewhat likely’. Data derived from Continu Onderzoek Burgerperspectieven 2013 nr 1, p. 25.

ambition is also reflected in the advice the school gives on what type of higher education a particular student should pursue.

And finally, expectations have also been raised with regard to marriage and family life.²⁵ This is apparent from the preferences mentioned in Dutch personal ads. Until the mid-1960s, the emphasis was on the practical aspects of marriage. The advertisers tended to give information about their financial position, their household situation or their profession. The same kinds of characteristics were also prioritised in terms of the future partner they were seeking. Not much was written about one’s own personal qualities or interests. In later decades we see a change, with the package of requirements heavily dominated by affective and psychological characteristics. In the mid-1980s, although men and women continued to mention their financial or household situation, much more attention was paid to personal aspects such as external appearance, a particular hobby or one’s education. And this was true not only for the way the candidates advertised themselves but also for the expectations they held regarding

25 Derived from Van den Brink 2007a, p. 119-121.

a possible partner. This matches with the way Dutch people view sexual fidelity. Due to the many sexual freedoms won since the sexual revolution, we sometimes believe that morals in this area have become quite loose. But this is not at all the case. Since 1970, researchers from the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (*Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau*) have regularly surveyed how Dutch people feel about the following statement: “The occasional one-night stand can do no harm to a good marriage”. In 1970, 40 percent of the respondents rejected this view. Since then, this percentage has risen gradually until by the mid-1990s, 78 percent of all respondents rejected this view.²⁶ In other words, the vast majority of people in the Netherlands value sexual fidelity in a relationship, and that share has risen rather than declined over the years.

5 The erosion of institutional frameworks

A rise in expectations does not always lead to problems. Much depends on the way a government, an organisation or a manager handles the situation, according to Albert Hirschman. In his book, *Exit, voice and loyalty*, he argues that citizens can resolve any dissatisfaction they have in three ways: they can switch to the competitor (*exit*), they can raise their voices (*voice*), or they can try to improve the situation (*loyalty*). For institutions in the private sector, the *exit* option is an obvious one, but employees in the public sector tend to rely on *voice* or *loyalty*.²⁷ What Hirschman did not foresee, however, was that institutions such as the state, family or the church have been put under pressure by citizens’ increasing expectations. This is precisely what has happened in the Netherlands and other modern societies in recent decades, as a result of which the number of *exit* options has risen sharply. We illustrate this by way of a few examples.

The first organisation where people increasingly began to choose the *exit* option was the church. Since the 1960s, the number of churchgoers in the Netherlands and elsewhere has declined sharply. While in 1958, three-quarters of the Dutch population was affiliated with a denomination, forty years later that share was less than 25 percent.²⁸ What is striking

²⁶ SCP 1998, p. 140.

²⁷ Hirschman 1970; see also Van den Brink 2012b, p. 19-36.

²⁸ Becker 2005, p. 62-64. Incidentally, this figure is based on a survey by the Netherlands Institute of Social Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, or SCP). The (less accurate) figure by CBS would mean that there is less of a decline in the number of churchgoers.

is that the drop in affiliation with the Dutch Reformed Church, while very dramatic, was mirrored in the decline in affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church. Incidentally, this development cannot be equated with secularisation, as many assume. We know that interest in religious values and practices remains quite significant. Thus, a large majority of Dutch people consider themselves religious people, and a significant share of the population believe in God or another higher authority. We return to this subject later in this book, so here we will limit ourselves to the observation that people are increasingly seeking spirituality outside of the church. The fact is that their participation in religious institutions has shown a steep decline. Moreover, the decline is not only quantitative: also in qualitative terms, the significance of the church has been undermined. Many modern believers harbour ideas derived from non-Western religious traditions.²⁹

A second realm in which people are often choosing the *exit* option is Dutch politics. The incentive to vote has gradually declined in recent decades. Turnout for general elections is still reasonable, although there has been a slight declining trend since the mid-1980s. In elections for the provincial councils of the 12 Dutch provinces and for the city councils, however, interest is much more modest. And the turnout for elections for the European parliament is not only low, it has also experienced the sharpest decline. Recent statistics show that 75 percent of eligible voters took part in general elections, 56 percent in provincial elections, 54 percent in municipal elections and only 37 percent in European elections.³⁰ Moreover, political parties also appear to be attracting fewer members (see graph 3.5). In 1963, almost one-tenth of the electorate (9.8 percent) was affiliated with a political party. By 1971, this share had dropped to 4.7 percent, and in 2010 it was only 2.5 percent.³¹ Trade unions have suffered a similar fate. At the beginning of the 1980s, workers were reasonably well-organised: around 39 percent of the paid labour force were union members. This percentage fell sharply, until by 2010 it was only 21 percent of the labour force. Although this was followed by a slight rebound, it came nowhere near the original degree of organisation.

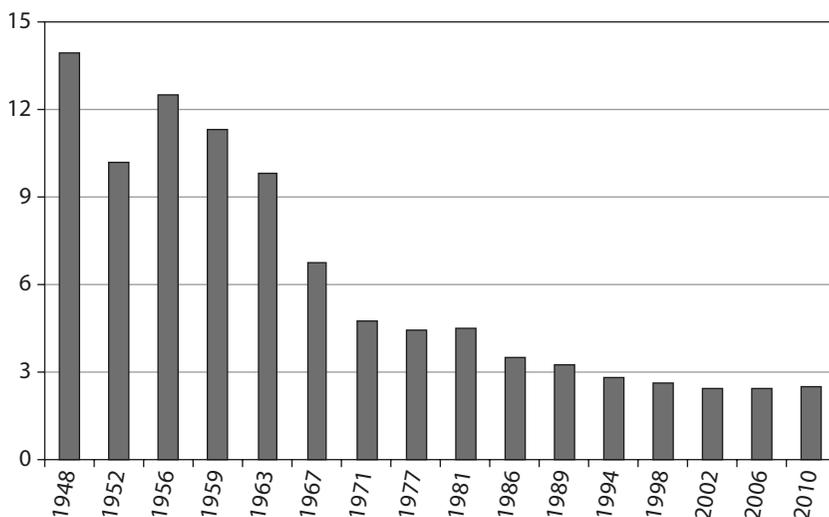
A third realm in which the *exit* option has become more common is in labour relations. This is a new trend for employees, who had been attached

29 For more information, see chapter 9, section 1.

30 Derived from www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl. The figures for parliamentary elections are from 2014, those for provincial elections are from 2011, and those for municipal elections and for the European Parliament are from 2014.

31 Lucardie & Voermans 2011, p. 210.

Graph 3.5 Members of political parties as a percentage of the number of eligible voters



Source: Lucardie & Voermans (2011), p. 210

to the idea of job security and who changed employers only when they had no other choice. In the past, people who remained with the same company for their entire lives were not an exception to the norm. This began to change in the 1980s, when not only employers but also employees looked for more flexible relations. One example of this is the growth in the number of part-time jobs in the Netherlands. While in 1987, some 2 million people worked part-time, this number had risen to more than 4 million workers by 2010 – a twofold increase in twenty years.³² A similar trend is evident in the increase in the number of employees with flexible working hours. Of the many factors that are of influence here, we highlight two. In recent decades, there has been a remarkable change in work motivation, with people not working exclusively for an income but increasingly attaching more value to other motives. Given this background, it is not surprising that they are often on the lookout for a new job and thus choose to leave their employer. In addition, a growing number of employees are deciding to work as independent contractors. Whether this decision is voluntary or not is, of course, open to question. Since the mid-1990s, the number of self-employed people has risen by 197 percent in the Netherlands, compared

32 CBS Statline (dated 2-6-2014).

with a 118 percent growth of the total working population.³³ Thus we see that the once solid structure of socioeconomic relations is slowly but surely beginning to change.³⁴

This trend of increasing flexibility is not limited to organisations in the public domain such as the church or political parties, it has also begun to affect the family and marriage. While Hirschman was of the opinion that *voice* or *loyalty* was crucial for these institutions, we see an increased mobility at work here as well. The private lives of modern Dutch people are completely different than what they were some forty years ago. Many people have freed themselves from the control of their parents or other family members over their intimate lives. Engaging in (and breaking off) sexual relations is now a strictly individual matter. In addition, less and less weight is put on the institutional side of marriage, while the emphasis is on the quality of the relationship. We can therefore conclude that the *exit* option has gained popularity also in this area. Given that partners have many expectations of each other, that there is a large market for available new partners, and that divorce is no longer a taboo, the *voice* and *loyalty* options have become less and less appealing.

All in all, we can conclude that traditional institutions in both the public and private realm have become less significant than in the past. Their ability to influence the behaviour of modern citizens is clearly declining, and this has to somehow be counterbalanced. When human behaviour is no longer regulated from above (by persons of authority) or externally (by forces of an institutional nature), then the determining force must come from within.

6 Rise in social mobility

What do these developments imply for society as a whole? If we had to describe modern Dutch society in one statement, what would it be? One decisive characteristic of Dutch society is that social intercourse has become very intensive. This phenomenon is not new to the Dutch, who have traditionally lived with a high population density. Between 1970 and 2000, however, four million people were added to this already densely populated country. A large part of this growth took place in the so-called *Randstad*, a conurbation encompassing the fourth largest cities in the country and more than 40 percent of the Dutch population. This has made ordinary

33 CBS Statline (dated 2-6-2014). The figures quoted relate to growth between 1996 and 2013.

34 The ambivalent consequences of this development are described in Sennet 2000.

life busier – certainly in the major cities – and social life very dense. This density is even enhanced by three other trends.

First there was an increase in spatial mobility, that is the ability to travel from one point to another in a short period of time. Travel possibilities have expanded enormously in the past half-century. Let's take the example of air travel. The annual number of air passengers passing through Schiphol Airport increased from 344,000 in 1950 to 50 million by 2008.³⁵ Given that a large portion of these passengers are tourists, however, we cannot attribute too much significance to this factor. Another factor that has undoubtedly had more impact on Dutch society is car travel, which experienced substantial growth. In 1955, the average number of passenger cars per 100 inhabitants was 1.3 in the Netherlands. A half-century later, this had shot up to 45.2 per 100 inhabitants,³⁶ resulting in an increase in car usage by a factor of 35. This development has had consequences for virtually all facets of life.³⁷ Automobiles give people more freedom of movement both physically and mentally. Car usage does, however, depend partly on one's social status. Highly educated Dutch people, for example, drove an average of 52 kilometres per day in 2005. For those with a limited education, this average was 18 kilometres. A similar effect can be seen with income: people with an annual income of €15,000 or less travelled on average 26 kilometres per day by car while those with an annual income of €30,000 or more travelled 60 kilometres per day.³⁸ This underscores the fact that spatial mobility is strongly correlated to one's socio-economic situation.

A second trend is the developments that have occurred in the means of communication. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Netherlands has undergone a complete metamorphosis in this area. We restrict ourselves here to mentioning a handful of trends. To begin with, there is the rise of television and its related mass media that has resulted in an unprecedented degree of visibility. In addition, there is the enormous impact of information technology, which has increased both the amount of information available as well as the speed with which that information circulates. We cannot possibly foresee the consequences this will have for society. And finally, communication between citizens has also increased dramatically, as can be seen by the changes in telephone traffic over the years (see graph 3.6).

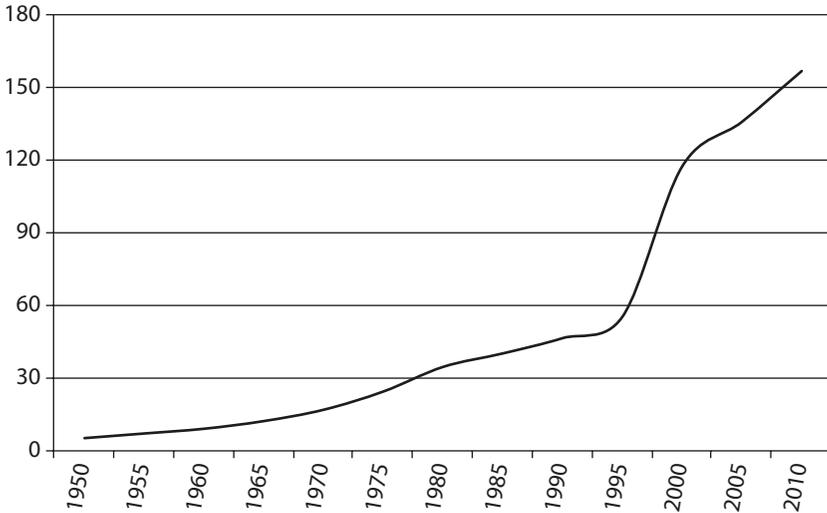
35 CBS 1994, p. 110 and CBS Statline.

36 CBS 1994, p. 107 and CBS Statline.

37 Jeekel 2011, p. 43-154.

38 CBS Statline (dated 12-10-2012). By low education, we mean those who have completed only primary education, and by highly educated we refer to those who have a university or higher professional degree. The figures are from 2005.

Graph 3.6 Number of (fixed-line + mobile) connections per 100 inhabitants in the Netherlands



Source: CBS Statline (dated 12-11-2012) and Kool et al. 2009, p. 9-10

Not only the number of telephones but also their actual use have risen. While one in 20 Dutch people had a telephone in 1950, this percentage was ten times higher in 1995. After 1995, there is a sudden acceleration in this growth, triggered by the introduction of the mobile telephone. The result is that a staggering number of telephone calls are made every day in the Netherlands.³⁹ If we take these three elements together (the growth of mass media + internet + telephony), we realise that the mobility of modern society has not only physical and economic facets. A massive torrent of words, images, insights and feelings is flowing through the country on a daily basis. These changes are also relevant because the Netherlands has one of the highest density of internet connections in Europe. At the end of 2013, no fewer than 95 percent of all households had access to the internet.⁴⁰

This brings us to the last trend we would like to mention: the fact that political mobility has increased significantly as well. This form of mobility is apparent from the fact that fewer and fewer people are members of political parties. We also know that there is less continuity between generations in elections. In 2000, only half of all voters had the same political affiliation as

39 CBS Statline (dated 12-11-2012) and Kool et al. 2009, p. 10-11.

40 CBS Telecompaper (dated 2-6-2014).

their parents, while this was true for three-quarters of all eligible voters in 1971.⁴¹ This illustrates just how scrambled the once-so-compartmentalised political landscape has become.⁴² Present-day citizens no longer let themselves be guided in their political behaviour by social characteristics such as class, religion or profession, and to a large extent they proceed on the basis of their own priorities or views. This has resulted in an increasing degree of fluctuation in voting behaviour. One example of this is the rise in electoral volatility in the Netherlands.⁴³ Although the share of voters who have switched their political preferences tends to fluctuate, this percentage has risen over the years. This does not mean that Dutch citizens are abandoning politics – on the contrary. What it does point to is that they do not allow themselves to be pinned down by the position of a party, and their choice usually depends on the political situation. Putting all these trends together, one could say that the Netherlands is moving full speed ahead in the direction of a ‘liquid society’. Society is increasingly marked by an all-encompassing mobility – spatially, economically, intellectually and politically. This recalls the concept of *liquid modernity* put forth by Zygmunt Bauman. There are few countries where this concept fits better than the Netherlands.⁴⁴

7 Family life

Trends such as higher expectations, institutional erosion and growing mobility can be found in many modern societies. The Netherlands is a particularly relevant case because the trends we mentioned can be observed so distinctly at the macro level. But how do these trends work on a smaller scale? To answer this question, we must turn our perspective around and view modern society from the interaction between individuals. We now look at how family life, civil life and professional life developed in the Netherlands.

In terms of the modernisation of family life, it is important to understand that love, sexuality, procreation and marriage formed one coherent package until well into the 1950s. That was certainly the standard model. While deviations from this model – such as unmarried motherhood or sex without

41 Van Houwelingen et al. 2010, p. 107.

42 De Rooy 2002, p. 262-292.

43 Net volatility is defined as the sum of the aggregate electoral growth of all the winning parties compared with the previous election (Van der Meer et al. 2012, p. 24).

44 Bauman 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2012.

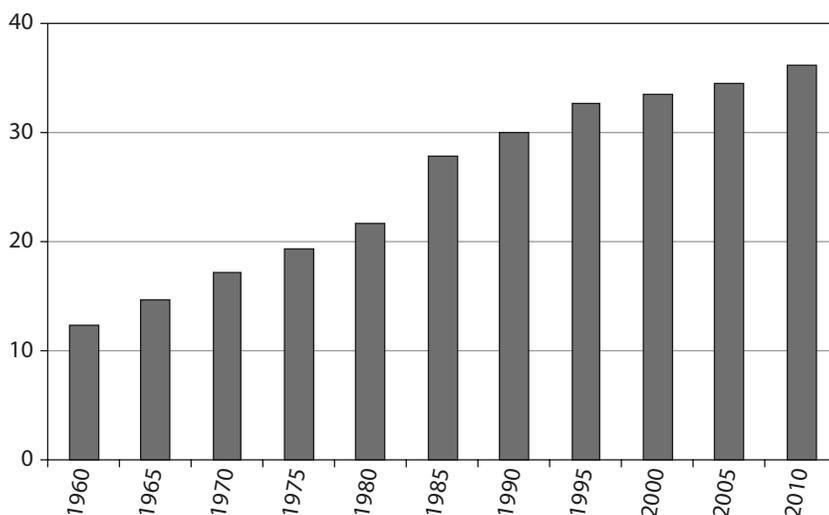
love – did of course occur, they were not recognised by society. This changed only in the 1960s, when contraceptives became available on a large scale. This not only led to the decoupling of sex and procreation, it also had an impact in other areas. By using the pill, fertility in married couples declined. While married women had on average three children in the 1960s, this fell to 1.5 children at the beginning of the 1980s.⁴⁵ This trend also brought a qualitative change in family life: more effort could be devoted to parenting because the amount of time, attention and energy spent per child rose. This effect was amplified by the fact that more and more household goods such as vacuum cleaners and washing machines were introduced into the house over the years, making housework much easier. Slowly but surely, the Dutch family developed into a specialised institution in which the children and their upbringing became the core business.

At the same time, the percentage of families among all households gradually declined. It became increasingly common for people to have sexual relations without wanting to have children. People also delayed having children – until they finished their studies, for example, or until they attained a good job. Moreover, the decoupling of sex and procreation made it possible to have sex without having a steady partner or even with multiple partners at the same time. This gave rise to a paradoxical development in the position of the family. From the perspective of children and their upbringing, the family grew in importance. But given the many other forms of relationships and lifestyles that emerged in the Netherlands following the sexual revolution, the significance of family life actually declined. More and more Dutch people are choosing to live their lives alone, either temporarily or permanently. The percentage of one-person households has grown so dramatically that at the moment one out of three households are made up of single people (see graph 3.7). This situation is often considered a consequence of the trend toward individualisation. This is correct to some extent, because starting a family is at odds with the pursuit of individual autonomy. But we should also understand that living life on one's own is not always a deliberate choice: those who lose their partners through death or divorce also end up as 'single' in the statistics.

Returning to the family, an important change took place from a social point of view in the balance of power between men and women. Let us not forget that the subordinate position of women in the past was (and outside of Europe still often is) based on how human procreation was arranged in family relationships. Also in this regard, the pill represented a revolution because the

45 CBS Statline (dated 3-3-2014).

Graph 3.7 One-person households as a percentage of the total number of households



Source: CBS Statline (dated 3-3-2014)

question of whether or not a woman was to have children became a strictly personal decision. This strengthened the power of women enormously, a change that had far-reaching consequences for family life and beyond. Within the family, for example, the dominance of men was called into question. The struggle against the 'patriarchy' waged by the second feminist wave in the Netherlands was successful in many respects. Modern relationships are based on equality and mutual consultation. Fathers these days also contribute to the upbringing of their children. What has been less successful is the quest for an equal distribution of the housework. Although the share performed by Dutch men has increased, most of the tasks are still done by their wives. And outside of the family, women are still struggling to obtain equal access to senior positions and equal payment for the same jobs. The net female labour participation rate did, however, increase from 34 percent in 1985 to 61 percent in 2012.⁴⁶ What is striking is that many women in the Netherlands prefer to work part-time. They are also increasingly landing managerial positions, although for many, this development is not unfolding swiftly enough.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ CBS Statline (dated 2-6-2014).

⁴⁷ 'Although much progress has been booked in the Netherlands in terms of women's empowerment, a large gap remains between the equal rights of men and women on the one hand

And finally, we would like to say a few words about changes in the Dutch mindset with regard to one's love life. Earlier, we mentioned that people consider the institutional aspect of living together less important and that they direct their attention to the personal and the emotional. The most important thing for them is the quality of the relationship. This is evident from the fact that cohabitation has become very popular. In fact, more than 40 percent of children in the Netherlands are born to mothers who are not formally married,⁴⁸ proving that people are basing important decisions such as starting a family on their personal motives. The price they have to pay is an increased probability of a separation. Separation is rarely the result of career-related or financial considerations. The most common reason is that the two partners do not fit together in personal or sexual terms. This underscores once again the significance of personal preferences and sexual identity, both of which have become increasingly important over the years. And this applies not only to partners in a heterosexual relationship; it is also true – perhaps even more so – for people with other preferences. The modernisation of love life in the Netherlands thus gave rise to the emancipation of homosexuals, bisexuals and transgenders. The result of this history is that we now have a multicoloured palette that includes both the traditional family and the most eccentric lifestyles.

8 Civic life

The Netherlands has always been a society of citizens. Already in the seventeenth century, societal life was determined to a large extent by an urban merchant citizenry. It was to take a few centuries before the routines of this civic life penetrated other layers of the population, but by now they are shared by almost everyone in Dutch society. This is also relevant to the period that we are focusing on here, when modernisation entered a new phase.⁴⁹

and the social reality on the other. This gap has not narrowed noticeably in recent years. The emancipation process has stagnated. The number of women in senior positions in government, education and business is increasing only very slowly, and the pay gap between women and men has remained unacceptably wide. Although young women have managed to eliminate the gender gap in education, this is not reflected in the income position of women or in their position in the labour market. The labour participation rate of women and the number of women in senior positions are among the lowest in Europe.' The quote is from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in a document on Emancipation policy 2008-2011 (OCW 2007, p. 9).

48 CBS Statline (dated 3-4-2014).

49 The following paragraphs were previously published in Van den Brink 2002, p. 76-86 and Van den Brink 2007a, p. 162-176.

One of the main characteristics of this society of citizens is its aversion to societal differences. There are, of course, differences in the Netherlands between the rich and those who live on benefits. But as soon as the differences begin to widen, this triggers a reaction. 'We wouldn't want to end up with American-style conditions!' is an often-heard response. The rising level of prosperity in the post-war period was thus shared equally. Everyone benefited, resulting in the development of a middle class that was well-off. Between 1980 and 2010, the standard income per household rose from €18,400 per year to €23,300.⁵⁰ This broad middle class continued to exist until very recently. Graph 3.8 shows how standardised income across all Dutch households was distributed in 2010. The average household income was almost €20,000 per year. Although the distribution is skewed given that the number of households with an above-average income is greater than the number of households whose income is lower than the average, the progression of the distribution is gradual. If we look at the historical trend, there is hardly any change in the degree of inequality: the so-called Gini coefficient has fluctuated between 0.27 and 0.29 since the turn of the millennium.⁵¹ This tells us that the idea of the Netherlands as an 'egalitarian society' is based on a certain reality.

Notwithstanding this egalitarianism, the way the Dutch view the process of modernisation depends in large part on what social category they belong to. In this regard, we can distinguish between three kinds of citizens. The first group includes people with a relatively high income who are highly educated and whose political inclinations lean towards the left. The second group is the opposite of the first: it includes people with a below-average income and a limited education. The third group is somewhere in between. In order to characterise the different attitudes that these three groups adopt with regard to modernity, we categorise them respectively as *active*, *threatened* and *resigned* citizens. Below, we outline the most important differences between these three groups.

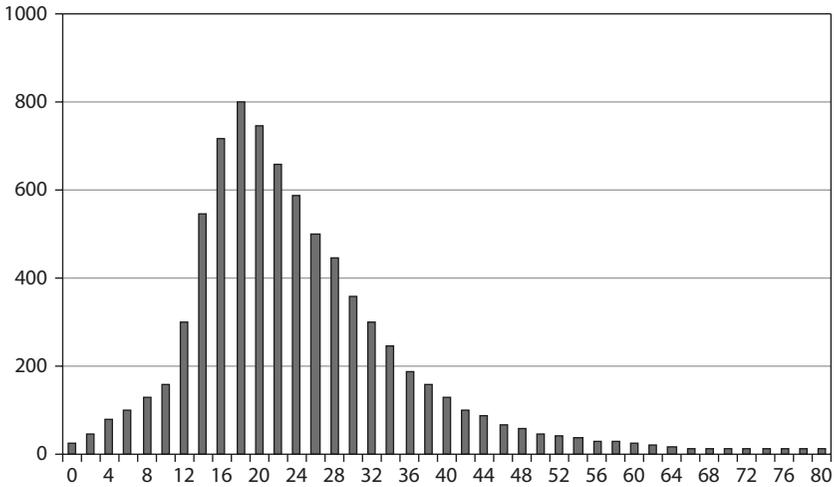
First, there is a clear difference in political interest.⁵² Active citizens are well aware of political affairs, are more likely than the average person to be a member of a political party, go to meetings more often and willingly volunteer their time for causes such as environmental conservation or social ideals. Threatened citizens are the opposite on all these points: they hardly follow politics, rarely attend political meetings and have little enthusiasm for civic ideals. Second, their attitudes towards democracy also differ. Threatened

50 In 2010 prices (CBS 2012, p. 19).

51 CBS 2012, p. 25.

52 These passages are based on Van den Brink 2007a, p. 171-175.

Graph 3.8 Households (x 1000) in 2010 categorised by standardised disposable income (for x-axis: 1 = 1000 euros)



Note: The 'standardised disposable household income' is the disposable income of households, corrected for differences in size and makeup of the household. This allows us to compare incomes from different types of households (derived from CBS 2012, p. 21 and 113).

citizens in particular are deeply dissatisfied with the functioning of Dutch democracy: they have little appreciation for government policy; they claim that MPs know nothing about real life; they participate less in elections; and they believe they have limited influence on the government. Active citizens, on the other hand, believe that Dutch democracy is working well; they always take part in elections; and they believe they have an influence on the government.⁵³ Incidentally, this does not mean that they are satisfied with the government's policy or that they abide by all the decisions made by the government. It is striking that it is precisely from active citizens that we hear the most criticism. They can be quite a nuisance to bureaucrats and politicians. They do this not because they are antidemocratic but precisely because they want to improve the functioning of democracy.

The third difference is the degree of moral certitude. Threatened citizens often say that the distinction between good and evil is no longer clear, that there is too much diversity in moral values in the Netherlands, or that views on morality change too rapidly. Active citizens have much less of a problem with this: while they make a clear distinction between good

53 For more information, see chapter 11, section 11 and graph 11.2.

and evil, they accept that others follow their own moral code.⁵⁴ The fourth contrast between active and threatened citizens has to do with how they would handle this diversity in moral values. Threatened citizens tend to choose a conservative position. They believe the antisocial elements of society should be removed. They also feel that strong leaders are needed who know what the people want and that there should be more respect for national symbols such as the national anthem or the national flag. Active citizens usually take the opposite stance: they are against removing criminals from society, and they resist calls for strong leadership. Although they also greatly value the Dutch way of life, they are much less interested in the preservation of national elements.

Thus it appears that, even in as egalitarian a country as the Netherlands, attitudes towards our modern existence can vary significantly. We can distinguish between three kinds of attitudes, each with their own view on public life. What is striking is that the upper echelons contain mostly active citizens while the threatened citizens occupy a weaker position in every respect. One could even cite Marx who said that the dominant ideas in a society are determined by the dominant class. However, we then encounter the paradoxical phenomenon that this class came to power by rebelling against notions that were dominant in the 1950s. The social-cultural changes generated by the 1960s were so successful that they continue to determine the essence of right-minded society in the Netherlands. The upper echelon is mainly concerned with democratic values and openness, wants to treat all cultural or ideological differences with respect, is a strong proponent of Europe and other supranational bodies, and more generally favours a modern lifestyle. This way of thinking has long dominated public life and, more specifically, political life. A significant part of the Dutch population has always disagreed with this way of thinking, but this discontent had rarely been expressed politically until 2000, when a form of right-wing populism emerged in the Netherlands (as in other parts of Europe). We return to how this phenomenon relates to moral sensitivity in a later chapter.

9 Professional life

As is well known, professionals play a significant role in modern society. They are often at the forefront of technological and economic innovation in the business world. They are essential for the functioning of the modern

government bureaucracy.⁵⁵ And they contribute to the flourishing of intellectual life in both the artistic and scientific fields.

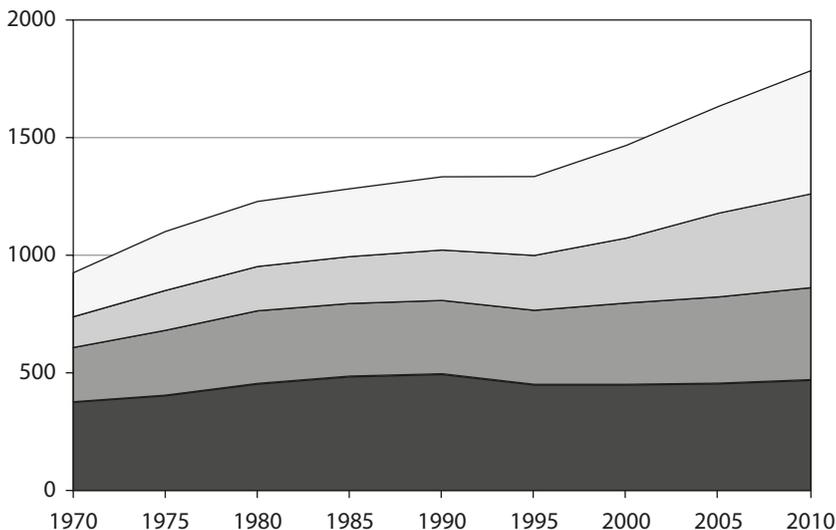
To understand their role in today's society, it is important to examine how professionals earn their income. In the past, most professionals had two options: they were either employed by a company in the private sector or they were self-employed. From the Second World War, however, professionals increasingly began to select a third option. Due to the development of the welfare state in the Netherlands, the number of professionals in the public (and semi-public) sector increased significantly. This encompasses not only civil servants working in public administration and other governmental services but also teachers teaching at various levels; doctors, specialists and nurses in the healthcare sector; and others who work for the welfare of citizens. As can be seen in graph 3.9, the number of jobs (measured in FTEs per year) in these sectors has almost doubled over the last forty years, with the welfare and healthcare sectors showing the strongest growth. Apart from the sheer volume, another interesting development in the public and semi-public sectors in the Netherlands is the increasing share of female professionals. Although the percentage of women working in healthcare and social services had always been significant, in recent decades their share has also grown in other sectors, for example in public administration. Another element of interest is the continually rising level of education of those working in the public and semi-public sectors. While it has always been the case that two-thirds of those working in the education sector have had a university or higher professional education, in government and healthcare services the level of education has been rising since 1970. This explains to a large extent why the costs of the Dutch welfare state have risen so sharply. A doubling of the volume of work, together with a continually rising level of education, inevitably led to sharp rises in government expenditure.⁵⁶

In recent decades, many attempts have been made to reduce these expenditures or to bring them under control. This seems to have succeeded only in some areas. There were other reasons as well for the government to step up its control over these professionals, for example the Anglo-Saxon philosophy known as new public management (NPM) that began to permeate the Netherlands. One of the main features of this philosophy is the application of working methods from the private sector to the public

55 Weber 1922, p. 650-678.

56 Moreover, the productivity of the public and semi-public sectors did not keep pace with the increase in the volume of work, which even declined between 1990 and 2000, with the result that relative costs rose considerably (SCP 2002, p. 82-101).

Graph 3.9 Cumulative number of jobs in FTEs per year (x 1000) in the public and semi-public sectors



Note: Public administration and governmental services (black), education (dark grey), healthcare (light grey) and social welfare (white). Figures based on CBS Statline (dated 2-3-2014).

and semi-public sectors. It is not our aim here to discuss whether such an approach is effective. We would simply comment that this approach has been introduced in many public institutions and has been the cause of much tension. In numerous schools, hospitals, police forces, courts, social services and branches of public administration, professionals feel they are being put under pressure. They are being required to fulfil targets set by management and can no longer deliver the quality associated with good professional practices. This is in any case a complaint that professionals themselves voice. And yet it is not only their managers who are putting them under pressure. What also plays a role is the fact that modern professionals now have to justify their actions to the outside world, much more so than in the past. Not only the media but also clients, politicians and sponsors are all watching them with a critical eye. And the fact that professionals increasingly have to collaborate with other people – not only with their colleagues but also with people from other professions – also appears to be a source of concern for them.

However, we should recognise that the contribution of professionals to solving human problems is sometimes ambiguous. There are, of course,

professions whose importance for the quality of life is not in dispute. The Netherlands and other advanced countries may consider themselves fortunate for having highly qualified judges, specialists and teachers. But with other professions, their added value is not always clear: think of how therapists approach certain life problems, how social workers set out to improve disadvantaged neighbourhoods, or how officials promote the public interest. As a result, the work that these professionals do is questioned regularly. Some defend themselves by trying to make their profession more scientific: they favour evidence-based working or advocate an improvement in procedures and professional guidelines. Such strategies, however, boil down to improving the means while the ends remain unexamined. In this way, professionals contribute to a further rationalisation of the world while the question remains whether this is necessary or desirable. This ambiguity also holds for professionals – such as officials and politicians – whose very job it is to express their opinions on objectives. These professionals also entrench themselves behind procedural methods: they give their opinions on whether or not the methods used are effective but do not speak out on the values or ideals at issue.⁵⁷

10 Conclusions

In the previous chapter, we described modern existence as a way of life that is characterised by three ideals: truth, efficiency and equality. Measured against this, Dutch society would appear to be very modern. In this chapter, we sketched the modernisation process that took place in the Netherlands in the last half century, which has revealed that modern ideals are being realised in many different ways.

We saw, for instance, that scientific insights and work methods play a role in every field, helped by the dramatic rise in the level of education in recent decades. The traditional gender gap in education has been eliminated, with women having surpassed the level of their male counterparts. Many professionals contribute to the further rationalisation of society. The pursuit of truth or fairness plays an important role in the Netherlands of today. This holds just as much for liberal values as for freedom and equality. From the 1960s onwards, traditional forms of authority have been rejected by many Dutch people, with commands being replaced by negotiations. Most citizens feel attached to democratic

57 See chapter 11, sections 8-10.

freedoms, certainly the freedom of expression. They want more influence on policy and are annoyed by politicians who do not take them seriously. They are fully committed to non-profit organisations. In their social lives, they have an aversion to people who try to stand out. There is a popular Dutch proverb that sums this up: 'Just act normal, that's already crazy enough'. At the same time, people should treat each other with respect. In family life, equality between the man and the woman is crucial. All this illustrates that Dutch people take the first two values of the French Revolution very seriously. Finally, they are also serious about the pursuit of efficiency, as evidenced by the steady increase in labour productivity and the resulting growth in prosperity. In terms of employment, there has been a shift from the business sector to the public services sector. Since the 1980s, many companies have devoted themselves to increasing their economies of scale and further rationalising and globalising their businesses. At the international level, the Dutch economy is performing quite well.

These developments combined have moved the Netherlands substantially in the direction of a 'liquid society'. This has had both positive and negative consequences. The ability of traditional institutions to steer people has collapsed. Many Dutch people no longer go to church and have disconnected themselves to a large extent from familial structures. They attach less significance to the institutional aspects of marriage. Divorce and cohabitation have become perfectly normal in recent decades. Political parties and trade unions have seen their membership drop, and the turnout at some elections has also declined. Finally, fewer and fewer employees remain with the same company for their entire lives. By way of summary, we have said that Dutch citizens increasingly show a preference for the *exit* option. At the same time, there is a strong dynamic that can be attributed to Dutch society. Social mobility has increased in every field. We pointed out the spatial movements, as seen in the sharp increase in car use and air travel. We mentioned the increasing flexibility of the workforce reflected in the growth of part-time jobs, temporary labour contracts and self-employed workers. And we described the increased volatility in the political field, evident in the rise in the number of undecided voters. Last but not least, we touched upon the spectacular increase in various media that has unleashed an unprecedented stream of messages, images and feelings. On all these points, social interaction has become so intense that one could consider the Netherlands a liquid society *par excellence*.

At the same time, this movement towards a liquid society does elicit a measure of ambivalence. We used three examples to illustrate this. The first

example is family life. Expectations rose as partners committed themselves to sharing their feelings, remaining sexually faithful and spending time raising their children. At the same time, fewer and fewer households consist of families. The number of singles continues to rise, as does the number of people who feel stuck in a relationship. A second ambivalence pertains to public life in the Netherlands. There are, on the one hand, citizens who willingly work for the public good, who hold democratic values, who reject authoritarian leaders and who themselves have a clear sense of right and wrong. And, on the other hand, there are citizens who take the opposite stance on all these points. They feel that there is too much moral diversity, that strong leaders are needed, and that incumbent politicians are squandering the national interest. A final ambivalence affects professionals in semi-public services. They were given a prominent task in the Netherlands (partly due to the expansion of the welfare state) and have contributed indisputably to the further modernisation of everyday life. At the same time, they are constantly under pressure, not only because managers, politicians and sponsors have tightened their control over their work but also because the significance of that work is being questioned.

Given the impact of all these trends, maintaining moral sentiments in a country such as the Netherlands is far from self-evident. This is the topic of our next chapter.

4 The hardening of the social climate

Gabriël van den Brink

In this chapter we discuss a number of symptoms indicating that the Netherlands is undergoing a form of moral erosion. If this process were to carry on to its logical conclusion, it would eventually spell the end of the entire society. We would then be left with just a gathering of individuals, each pursuing their own interests and having little in common with one another (let alone being attentive to the needs of their fellow human beings). While no one believes that the Netherlands will end up in such a state, many fear that we are moving in that direction. For some time now, there has been a certain pessimism about the moral state of modern society. This mood is sometimes reminiscent of the unease that existed in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century, described by Simon Schama in *The Embarrassment of Riches*. At that time, the Dutch were deeply concerned about whether their material prosperity would result in moral corruption.¹ Similarly, in recent years people have begun to ask themselves whether certain achievements of the modern era such as prosperity, security, the welfare state and technological innovation are at odds with the more fundamental values of human existence. It is certainly telling that since the 1990s, many of the most intelligent social commentators have adopted a conservative slant.²

Below, we discuss some trends that would appear to justify this pessimism. This means that we will be presenting a one-sided picture of modern Dutch society, although further on we will have the opportunity to provide counterexamples. We begin with the process of secularisation that experienced a sudden acceleration in the Netherlands from the 1960s (section 1) and say something about the more physically oriented culture that developed in line with this (section 2). Then we discuss several excesses of this culture, namely the way in which the youth spend their leisure time and the intense experiences they seek (section 3). We also look at the increase in violent behaviour as revealed in the statistics (section 4). A few words should also be said on the change in social norms (section 5) and the effects this has had on the formation of public opinion (section 6). This brings us to a trend

¹ Schama 1988, p. 295-375.

² We are thinking here of authors who question the neoliberal optimism of the 1990s in the Netherlands such as Govert Buijs, Thierry Baudet, René Cuperus, Paul Frissen, Bas Heijne, Andreas Kinneping, Paul van Tongeren, Paul Scheffer and Ad Verbrugge.

that is as notable as it is worrying, namely the steady decline in tolerance for bothersome behaviour (section 7), a development that affects the social position of immigrants in particular (section 8). Finally, we discuss the moral confusion that has emerged in the last twenty years or so (section 9), after which we bring the chapter to a close by drawing a few conclusions (section 10). It goes without saying that all of what we write here is open to debate. Some of the data we use can be interpreted in different ways, but this does not call into question the reliability of the data itself.

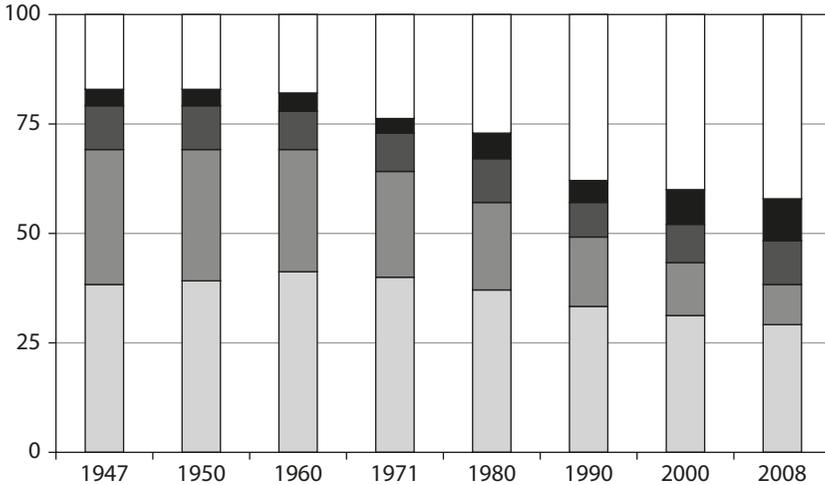
1 Secularisation

The phenomenon of secularisation can be considered one of the possible negative effects of modernisation. The spread of modern ideas and values has eroded the authority of the church, and some fear that this could be having a negative impact on the moral calibre of society. Let us first consider the facts. We use figures from Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, or CBS) to map out the process of secularisation.³ The statistics show a rise in the number of Dutch citizens not affiliated with any religious community – from only a few percent of the entire population at the end of the nineteenth century to 42 percent by 2008. The decline in the number of churchgoers was mainly at the expense of the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk). In 1899, almost half of the Dutch population (49 percent) belonged to this church, but this share is currently less than 10 percent. Other denominations experienced a smaller decline. The number of Catholics fell from 35 percent to 29 percent over the same period. The number of Dutch citizens affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, not to be confused with the Dutch Reformed Church) has remained relatively constant, fluctuating between 8 and 10 percent.⁴ The faiths lumped under the category ‘other’ have never represented more than 6 percent, although there was a slight rise in this category towards the end of the period under consideration here. Graph 4.1 confirms the secularisation trend in the Netherlands, but

3 CBS 1994, p. 33; CBS 2009, p. 13–15. The data for 1950 and 2000 are based on interpolation.

4 It is nearly impossible to describe in a few words the religious landscape in the Netherlands as it has developed the last century. Nevertheless, readers should keep in mind one important distinction in order to understand our argument here. The Protestant population can be divided into members of the Dutch Reformed Church, the Christian Reformed Church and a number of smaller denominations. While the second group belongs to a pietistic tradition, the first follows a more liberal line.

Graph 4.1 Share (percent) of the main denominations in the Netherlands



The bars represent five groups: Roman Catholics (light grey), members of the Dutch Reformed Church (grey), members of the Christian Reformed Church (dark grey), other (black) and Dutch citizens without a religion (white).

Source: CBS 1994, p. 33; CBS 2009, p. 13-15

we would add three caveats to this. To begin with, one cannot say that this process began after the Second World War. At the beginning of the 20th century, five percent of the population were non-churchgoers, and by the 1930s this share had already risen to 15 percent. Moreover, there were many sectors in society where religion hardly played a role. Compared with other countries, the Netherlands was at the forefront in this respect.⁵ Many people of faith consider the 1960s to be the period in which this secularisation process began, but in fact it was simply a question of an acceleration of a process that was already underway. The share of non-churchgoers jumped from 18 to 38 percent between 1960 and 1990. Nonetheless, it would be incorrect to say that huge numbers of Dutch people turned their backs on the church and on religion in this period. Furthermore, the decline did not occur at the same pace over the decades. From 1990, a certain balance appears to have emerged, with more than half of all Dutch citizens calling themselves religious. Our conclusion is thus that the process of secularisation has been going on for some time now but has not proceeded in a linear fashion, and that it has not (yet) spread to a majority of the population.⁶

5 Kennedy 2005, p. 34; Van Harskamp 2005, p. 44-45.

6 Becker & De Hart 2006, Bernts et al. 2006, Sengers 2005; De Hart 2008.

Perhaps these quantitative changes do not tell us as much as the qualitative changes that spiritual life has undergone. We highlight two changes in this regard. On the one hand, more and more Christians are breaking free of traditional churches. They maintain their belief in God, heaven and the commandment to love one's neighbour, but they no longer participate in mass or any religious service. They live their faith increasingly outside of any institutional context. On the other hand, the non-churchgoers in the Netherlands are becoming more interested in spiritual matters. They are immersing themselves not in Christianity but in other religious traditions, often those that have roots in Asia. New themes in which inner experiences play a central role are increasingly being explored. The development in the spiritual life of the Dutch thus seems to be conforming to a more general pattern, one that according to Paul Heelas characterises the New Age movement.⁷ Three traits of this development in spirituality are relevant for us.

First, what is striking about religion – however one defines it – is the highly personal manner in which it is given shape in modern society. The focus is on one's personal experience, the choice that one makes oneself, the inner experience of one's faith, and contact with the sacred core that lies deep within us. The *Zeitgeist* is also a factor here, for the 1980s and 1990s were a period in which heavy emphasis was placed on the self. This does not necessarily come down to a form of selfishness; the self can also be a place where one is more receptive to the sacred.⁸ In this context, Robert Bellah coined the term 'expressive individualism',⁹ which is not about identification with a God beyond oneself but rather something divine that is present within oneself. This type of religiosity has gained momentum.

A second characteristic of spirituality today is its focus on positive sentiments. The notion that religion alluded to fear, guilt and sin was more or less dispensed with in the Netherlands after the Second World War. In 1969, the

7 Heelas 1996, p. 225-226. Incidentally, our view on the ambivalent relationship between moral values and modernity (see chapter 1, section 8 and 9) differs from the way in which Heelas treats this theme (1996, p. 135-). While Heelas is willing to see the New Age movement as a modern form of spirituality, we tend to emphasise the incongruence between morality and modernity.

8 Van Harskamp 2005, p. 48. This concentration on the self is certainly not new. It can be traced back to the nineteenth century, for example with the American poet Walt Whitman. His collection of poems entitled *Leaves of Grass* (1855) opens with a poem called *Song of Myself*, the first line of which reads 'I celebrate myself'. Somewhat later, the Dutch poet Willem Kloos wrote the line that became famous in the Netherlands: 'I am a God in the deepest of my thoughts and sit enthroned in the innermost part of my soul.' What at the time was the privilege of a literary elite has now developed into a widely pursued lifestyle.

9 Bellah et al. 2008, p. 33-34. We come back to this form of self-expression when we discuss the theory formulated by Norris and Inglehart on the development of modern values (see chapter 6).

synod of the Christian Reformed Church abandoned the doctrine of eternal damnation. The previous approach emphasising guilt and atonement made way for a religious optimism that stressed such things as trust and joy. From the 1980s, a more loving image of God emerged across the board. Many believers removed all personal characteristics from their image of God and began to see God as a positive Force or Energy. The intuitive aspect of the religious experience became more important. Certain religious movements began to deliberately seek out intense sensations. This may be linked to a new function that religion has in modern societies, namely that of offering a counterweight to the process of 'disenchantment' or of seeking solace in a world that many perceive as being tough, cold and competitive.¹⁰ According to Stef Aupers, the New Age movement has transformed itself from a 1970s counterculture into a commercial culture that has successfully moved into this religious market. Its success is partly fuelled by the dissatisfaction with the scientific approach offered by the average psychotherapist. A common complaint heard is that the therapist follows a rational method without giving consideration to a person's intuitive development, feelings and personal experiences.¹¹

A third trait of religious life today is its great diversity. We already mentioned that at the end of the nineteenth century, the religious landscape in the Netherlands was dominated by two groups: Catholics and Protestants together comprised the majority of churchgoing believers. Other denominations occupied only 16 percent of the total. Today, the Netherlands has a broad spectrum of faith-based tendencies. On all fronts, the variety has increased significantly. Despite the merger of three Christian churches in 2004 to form the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, or PKN), the number of denominations has expanded further. What stands out in particular is the increase in the number of small denominations. The same is true of the category designated as 'other': there are almost one million Muslims in the Netherlands, and smaller groups (Hindus, Buddhists, etc.) are also flourishing. As mentioned, even the 'non-believing' Dutch are increasingly taking an interest in religion. While only 16 percent of the Dutch population call themselves atheists, 42 percent of the population feel an affinity with alternative religious ideas. This is evidenced by the widespread popularity of courses in yoga, Zen meditation, reincarnation, astrology, UFOs, parapsychology, spirituality, holism and healing crystals.¹²

10 Van Harskamp 2005, p. 48-53.

11 Aupers 2005, p. 188-194.

12 Aupers 2005, p. 181.

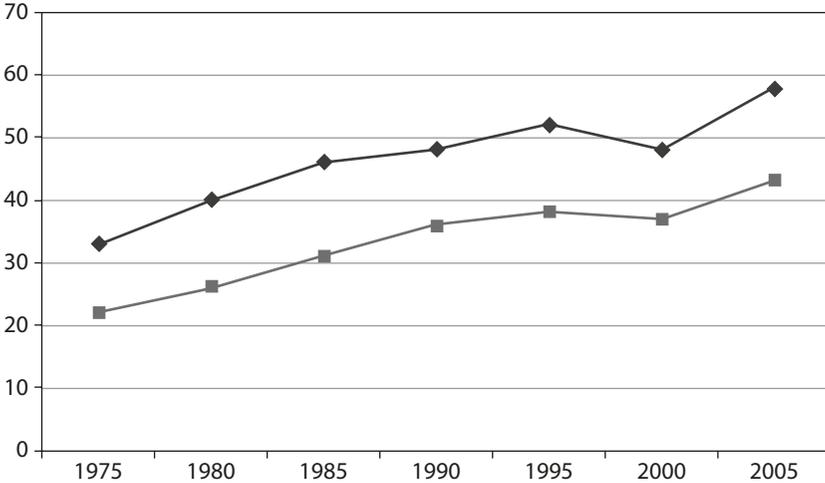
2 More sports

All this is yet further confirmation that modernisation does not always lead to the consequences we would expect. One would think that the pursuit of rationality, individuality and efficiency would lead to a more business-like attitude in religious life, but this is not the case. The trend towards individualisation is indeed continuing, but it is primarily the affective sides that are being reinforced. This is consistent with another trend: a positive attitude towards vitality. In the Christian tradition, everything that had to do with corporeality was a loaded topic. That changed when Christian morality was dispensed with (or at least made marginal) in the 1970s. This was the period in which the 'sexual revolution' occurred, when people experimented with new forms of relationships to their hearts' content. We already outlined the consequences of this for family life in the previous chapter. Here, we limit ourselves to another form of corporeality: the fact that from the 1970s, more interest began to emerge in playing a sport.

In recent decades, more and more citizens have begun to consider sports fun, exciting, meaningful, healthy, challenging or worthwhile. They gladly exercise their bodies, even if it means a substantial investment in time, money and personal effort. Despite the continuous increase in the last forty years in the number of commitments they have, the amount of time spent on sports rose from an average of 1.5 hours per week in 1975 to 2.6 hours per week in 2005. The number of athletes has also increased (see graph 4.2). When a broad definition is used, 'athletes' currently make up 58 percent of the population, while in the mid-1970s, this was only 33 percent. When a stricter criterion is used – i.e. playing sports at least once a week – then there are fewer athletes in the Netherlands, but an increase can still be detected: from 22 percent in the mid-1970s to 43 percent in 2005. And for the time being, it would appear that the end of this development is not in sight: the longer-term trend reveals an acceleration in the rise in sports participation. Apart from the increased pleasure for those directly involved, this also has advantages for the society at large. Koen Breedveld and others point out that sports contributes to a more positive self-image, the strengthening of social bonds, an improved ability to learn, and savings in healthcare costs to the tune of approximately 700 million euros per year.¹³ There can be no doubt that the vitality of the Dutch population benefits from this.

13 Breedveld et al. 2008, p. 36, 74-80, 337-339.

Graph 4.2 Participation (percent) in sports on the basis of questionnaires (upper line) and journals filled in as part of the SCP's survey on time allocation (lower line)



Source: Breedveld et al. 2008, p. 74-75

Researchers note that mastering one’s own body has become an important theme for a large part of the population.¹⁴ Slowly but surely, the ideal of an impeccable or respectable appearance that used to exist was replaced by the quest for a youthful and vigorous aura. This plays an important role in modern life, not only because the media prefers to show images of young, perfect, energetic bodies but also because there is now a real relationship market, as a result of which people are paying more attention to their appearance. Apart from sports, the focus on one’s appearance is also fuelled by fashion, controlled eating patterns and cosmetic procedures.¹⁵ Finally, sports offers a good counterbalance to the stress that often characterises modern life. Twenty years ago, sociologists pointed out that sports can be a way to escape the daily grind. Since then, the significance of sports has only increased. It is precisely the busy people who have enough money to enjoy

14 Today, more than 2 million Dutch people are members of a fitness centre. ‘From this point of view, there is hardly any conflict between sport and fitness as forms of physical education: they are complementary activities. Sports is a world of pleasurable competition, where young and old seek to realise their dreams of becoming a great athlete. Fitness has become a world in which people can shape their appearance and vitality so that they can hold their own in society.’ (Breedveld et al. 2008, p. 319).

15 Breedveld et al. 2008, p. 318-323, 328.

new experiences in their free time. In the past they might have gone to a concert or a museum of fine arts. But the cerebral aspect and the restrained nature of such types of recreation do not fit as well with the zeitgeist that has developed in recent decades in the Netherlands. Breedveld writes: 'Now the emphasis is on experiencing things together and expressing intense emotions (...) In addition, the revealing sports clothing of today is in line with our changed views on sexuality and the more playful manner in which we handle our power to physically attract others'.¹⁶

3 Intense experiences

Related to this increase in vitality is the emergence of informal ways of social interaction in the Netherlands. Sociologists note that people nowadays have adopted a looser, more spontaneous or personal tone at work and in the public realm. This development can to a great extent be explained by changes in education and child-rearing. In the 1950s, self-control, discipline and obedience were the key concepts when it came to educating children. But in the 1970s, the focus moved towards other aspects such as personal development and the emotional life of children.¹⁷ Teachers began to attach less value to an orderly state of affairs in the classroom and turned their attention instead to working on the self-development of their students. They were no longer addressed as Mr. or Mrs. and allowed themselves to be spoken to in more informal language. This emphasis on a looser relationship and a more personal approach was widely accepted.¹⁸ It was accompanied by a relaxation of educational standards and a better alignment between the students' environment and the method of education or subject material. A different pedagogical regime thus developed. A similar shift occurred in the family, with the intuitive bond between parents and children taking centre stage and less emphasis placed on obedience. The traditional principles of 'rest, routine and rules of hygiene' were toned down. At the same time, deferring gratification began to seem unnecessary, partly due to the sharp rise in prosperity.¹⁹

All this has resulted in a very different lifestyle for Dutch people compared with several decades ago. They give themselves over to pleasure

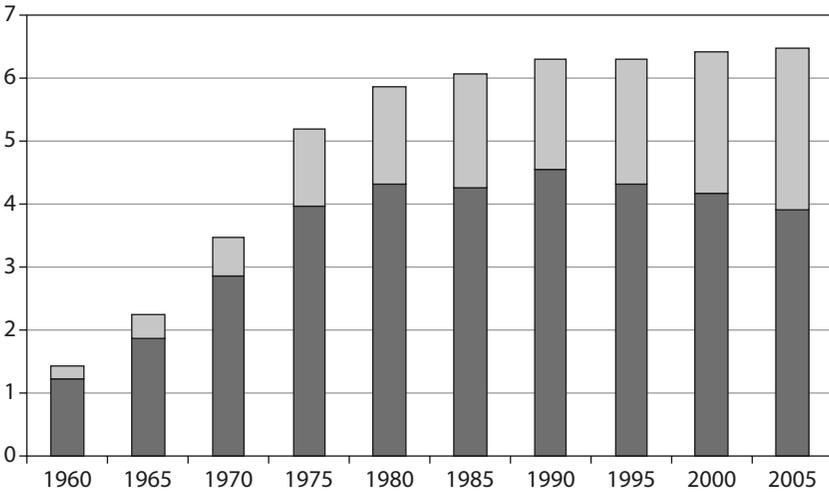
16 Breedveld et al. 2008, p. 336.

17 Wouters 2008, p. 262-295.

18 Vuijsje & Wouters 1999, p. 21-27, 65-69.

19 Van den Brink 1997 p. 57-104.

Graph 4.3 Amount of pure alcohol (litres per year) consumed per capita in the form of beer (dark grey) or wine (light grey)



Source: CBS Statline dated 3-6-2014

more often, take a strong interest in sensory stimulations, attach great importance to sports and dance, seek their identity in visual or musical preferences, enter adeptly into personal relationships, speak openly about their sexual experiences, let it bluntly be known if they think someone is a buffoon, begin drinking alcohol at a young age, think that taking pills when going out at night is normal, like to take part in something exciting while on vacation, let themselves be overwhelmed by light and sound effects in a movie theatre, re-enact battles or wars on the computer, and always have an opinion at the ready during discussions.²⁰ In short, they maintain a lifestyle that could be described as an *Erlebniskultur* or a culture of sensations.²¹

An important difference with the simple lifestyle of a few decades ago is that we allow ourselves more disinhibition. This is also a result of the increase in alcohol consumption. Alcohol amplifies one’s mood: drinking allows one to feel both joy and sadness more intensely, just as it intensifies anger. Graph 4.3 shows that the amount of alcohol drunk per person increased very rapidly between 1960 and 1980. Thereafter, the amount of alcohol intake has remained more or less at the same level, although wine

20 Spangenberg & Lampert 2009.

21 This trend was recognised by the *Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* some time ago. See, for example, SCP 1998, p. 711-730.

began to replace other drinks. At the same time, we know that young people now begin drinking from a younger age and that they come home drunk more often. Especially in combination with the more vital lifestyle, this has since the 1970s led to the more frequent occurrence of aggressive behaviour. Today, more than half of the cases of assault involve the (excessive) intake of alcohol, and we are not even including the effects of the use of pills.²² All this is at odds with the moral values that we outlined in chapter 1. One could even say that these values are being threatened or eroded by the *Erlebniskultur* that has developed in leisure time, where everything revolves around one's own intense experiences and not around empathising with other people's situation.²³

4 More violence

Combining these two developments – the declining influence of the church and the increasing interest in the physical – can lead one to conclude that the modernisation of society has a number of negative consequences, for example an increase in anti-social or violent behaviour.²⁴ To illustrate that such a conclusion is not entirely unfounded, we analyse the criminal statistics. In graph 4.4, we see that the number of registered violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants increased by more than a factor of five between 1970 and 2005. The number of registered crimes involving vandalism and disturbance of the public order increased by an even greater factor of 9. Although there is a decline after 2005, the level is still higher than a few decades ago. This would suggest that more and more citizens have little regard for moral values.

The explanation for this increase must be found in the assertive lifestyle that has spread to a large part of the Dutch population in recent decades. When the self-esteem of citizens increases, so does their vulnerability. Those who have a large ego can easily be offended by the behaviour of others.²⁵ Those who need a substantial amount of social and physical space for themselves usually find it difficult to accommodate others. It is

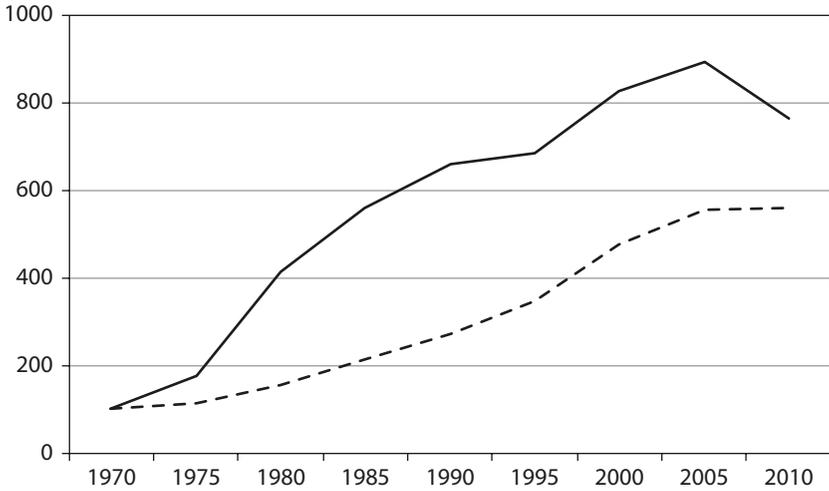
22 The completely out-of-control Project X party in Haren in the northeastern part of the Netherlands illustrates what excessive alcohol consumption in combination with other factors can lead to (Van den Brink et al. 2013a p. 35-49, 107-132; see also Van Hasselt 2013, p. 205-225 and Baumeister 1997, p. 25, 44, 123-140).

23 See also De Cauter 2009, Nabben 2010, Ossebaard 1996.

24 Van Stokkom 2005, 2010; Van den Brink 2001, p. 37-54.

25 Baumeister 1997, p. 25-26, 42-53, 123-149, 263-268, 306-313, 376-377.

Graph 4.4 Indexed development (1970 = 100 percent) of registered violent crimes (dotted line) and instances of vandalism or disturbance of the public order (upper line) per 100,000 inhabitants



Source: CBS Statline

therefore not surprising that assertive citizens feel hurt relatively quickly. Certain kinds of treatment or comments that were considered normal two generations ago are now perceived as a violation of our integrity. Touching is quickly seen as unwanted intimacy, and the game of sexual attraction is losing its ambiguity: if a girl says no, she means no. There is a similar change in what is considered correct behaviour. A condescending attitude towards ethnic, religious or sexual minorities is no longer considered appropriate. And the notion that we should treat each other as equal citizens has become widely accepted.

This explains the fact that Dutch citizens have a relatively high likelihood of becoming the victim of assault. This is a trend that has emerged in all the modern countries of northwest Europe. A comparison shows that the Netherlands is in the top ranks in Europe in this regard, together with Ireland, England, Sweden and Denmark, while the likelihood of victimisation in countries such as Spain, Portugal or Italy is much lower.²⁶ Does this mean that, objectively speaking, there is less aggressive behaviour in southern or eastern Europe and that citizens in northwest Europe have gradually become more aggressive? We clearly cannot exclude this possibility, but

²⁶ Burden of Crime in the EU 2005, p. 103-104.

this data can also be interpreted in a different manner. We could conclude that in northwest Europe, the tolerance for unwanted behaviour is lower, while the willingness to report it is greater. This dovetails with the fact that modern societies generally have high standards and seek a high degree of transparency. In less modern societies, people are allowed considerable leeway, and standards are often more flexible. This is one of the reasons why we should view the rise in violent behaviour in the criminal statistics with a critical eye. These statistics are not a direct reflection of reality. Registered violent crimes also increase when citizens are more willing to report such crimes or when the concept of 'assault' is defined in a new way.²⁷ In other words, aside from reflecting an objective development, a statistical increase can also indicate changes of a subjective nature.

5 Greater visibility

Such changes in the way things are defined or tolerated do not occur out of the blue. They can in part be attributed to the pursuit of professionalisation in modern society. Let us not forget that the work of professionals is – implicitly or explicitly – of a normative nature. Teachers, police officers, doctors, notaries, researchers or civil servants inevitably deal with people and human behaviour in their work. While the behaviour they encounter may be diverse, it does usually move within a certain bandwidth. Professionals pay particular attention to people or behaviour that (significantly) deviate from the norm. They map out these deviations and try to understand their significance. Their aim is to counteract adverse effects, and they try out new instruments in the hope of increasing their knowledge.

This endeavour has not been without its successes in the past half century. Among other things, it has resulted in more and more 'problems' appearing; that is, many types of behaviour that were considered 'normal' thirty years ago are now seen as 'problematic'.²⁸ A striking example of this

27 In fact, there are several circumstances that (may) cause the number of crimes in a given time period to rise: a) a real increase in criminal activity; b) a higher sensitivity among the public; c) a greater willingness to report crimes; d) a clearer legal definition of the crime; e) better handling of witness statements and official complaint reports (due to computerisation); and f) political pressure on the police to track down more crimes. It is apparent that a 'real' increase is only one of many factors.

28 Frits van Wel suggested the term 'intervention logic' for this phenomenon, using a theoretical framework from the social sciences in order to guide professionals in their practical interventions. Professionals thus influence the definition of the problem as well as the means by which

is bullying among children. There have always been children that have been bullied by their schoolmates, but for a long time this was not considered a reason for concern. It was condoned and seen to be a normal thing or even something that made you stronger. This was the case until Ton Booij at the *Instituut voor Toegepaste Sociologie* (Institute of Applied Sociology) conducted a serious study into bullying at schools in the early 1990s. He not only showed the negative effects of this phenomenon, he also pointed out what social mechanisms play a role in it and how schools could counteract bullying.²⁹ From that moment, bullying became a form of anti-social behaviour, and schools had to develop an anti-bullying policy. The result of all this was that students who behaved in a way that had been coined 'normal' for a long time suddenly had a serious problem. The same kind of development can be seen in other areas, such as the increased attention devoted to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or dyslexia and the growing concern for obesity. Another example is the behaviour that certain men used to indulge in towards women and that is now experienced as unwanted intimacy. Smoking cigarettes was for decades a sign of an adult trait but is now considered a cardinal sin from both a medical and social point of view. And all kinds of youth behaviour that in the past had been described as harmless pranks are now regarded as a form of nuisance.³⁰

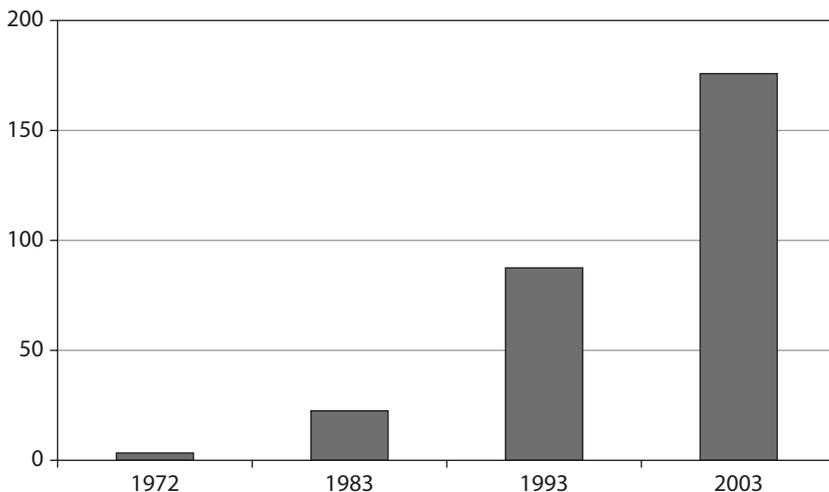
Besides insights gleaned from professionals, what also plays a role here is a change in societal standards. An important characteristic of modern society is the disappearance of the culture of shame and privacy. This is also true for one's private life, where wrongs used to be swept away under the cloak of love. The second feminist wave was partly responsible for putting an end to this. Today, we are no longer ashamed when it comes to sex and relationships or our upbringing and family life.³¹ Numerous intimacies that had previously been hidden from others can now be seen on TV and

the problem is solved and the objectives that are fulfilled as a result. However, due to the diversity of professionals, this often gives rise not only to diverging definitions of the problem but also to diverging solutions (Abma 2011, p. 86-90).

29 Booij 1992. In later years, Booij published at least 13 reports and articles on the same subject, which illustrates that public attention for the problem of antisocial behavior has not diminished.

30 Although it may be obvious to the reader, we would point out that we are not talking here about 'fictitious' developments where professionals need only 'think up' definitions of problems that they then 'impose' on others. We are talking about genuine divergences that only take on social significance when they are interpreted by professionals. Professional knowledge in modern society plays a decisive role in determining what the norm is and how we should handle any deviations (see also Dehue 2014, Wubs 2004).

31 This is an allusion to a book published forty years ago by the famous Dutch feminist Anja Meulenbelt, *De schaamte voorbij* (*Beyond the Shame*, Meulenbelt 1976).

Graph 4.5 Reports of 'suspected child abuse' per 100,000 inhabitants

Source: Driessen 2008, p. 34

elsewhere. A culture of transparency has emerged that also affects public and professional life. This has consequences for the visibility of immoral behaviour. Take, for example, the issue of child abuse. Although this kind of abuse is probably an age-old problem, it is only since the 1970s that it has been brought out of the realm of the unspoken and into the open. Nowadays, those who suspect child abuse can report it anonymously to a government agency, a procedure that has been used increasingly in recent decades. Figures show that the number of suspected cases of child abuse increased by a factor of 8 between 1983 and 2003 (see graph 4.5). It seems unlikely that this is the result of parents abusing their children more than in the past, although we cannot completely exclude an increase resulting from stress, problems with raising children, or increased alcohol consumption.³² Even given that an increase may have taken place as a result of these three factors, it still cannot explain the enormous rise over the last 30 years. The explanation must then lie in the fact that both citizens and professionals

32 Research conducted by Cees Schuyt and others into daily life in Sassenheim has shown that child-rearing became increasingly intensive from the 1950s onwards. The share of children who were rewarded by their father or mother for certain behaviour gradually increased over the years. The same holds for the share of children who were punished by their parents for something they had done. But the use of physical punishment (such as a spanking) declined over this period (Van den Brink 2001, p. 62-68).

have become more sensitive to this problem and the fact that since 1972 there is a channel for notifying authorities of suspected cases of child abuse.

6 Moving in the wrong direction

This increase in sensitivity – certainly in combination with a more assertive and aggressive disposition among citizens – is having a negative impact on civic life. This is evident from surveys that have been conducted on a regular basis for some time in the Netherlands. One of the survey questions is related to the moral side of society: ‘Some people believe that views on behaviour and morals are increasingly deteriorating in our country, others believe that it is getting better. What is your opinion on this?’ The possible answers were: a) they are getting better; b) they are about the same; and c) they are getting worse.³³ The results seem to speak for themselves. As can be seen in graph 4.6, more and more people believe that Dutch society is moving in the wrong direction. At the end of the 1960s, one-third of the population was pessimistic (34 percent), but forty years later this had risen to two-thirds (67 percent). This corresponds with the results of the Citizens’ Outlook Barometer (COB)³⁴ in which complaints about rough and anti-social behaviour have for years topped the list of public concerns. Respondents bemoan the tougher social climate in which people think primarily about themselves and have little consideration for others.³⁵ This hardening is particularly evident in the public debate in the Netherlands, where statements that most Dutch people would have felt ashamed of thirty years ago are regularly made.³⁶ How are we to interpret this? It is unlikely that public opinion is fully in line with social reality. If it really was the case that public morality has been deteriorating for thirty years, then the Netherlands today would be a social wasteland. A more plausible explanation is that it

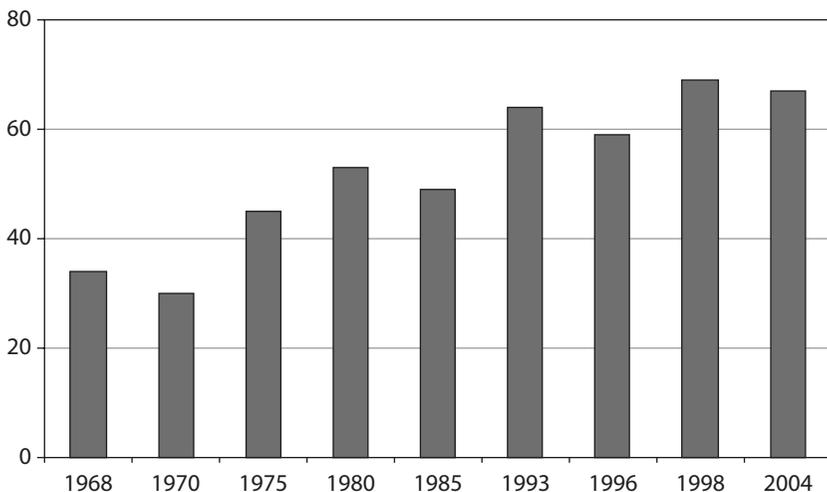
33 Dekker et al. 2004, p. 25.

34 Responding to massive signs of discontent among the general public in 2008, the Netherlands Institute for Sociale Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau) started to publish a Citizens’ Outlook Barometer (Continu Onderzoek Burgerperspectieven or COB). It is published four times a year and covers a large variety of subjects that are perceived to be worrying the Dutch population. Until now, professor Paul Dekker has been responsible for the production of these reports.

35 Dekker & Den Ridder 2011b, p. 6; see also Dekker et al. 2010, 2010b, Den Ridder et al. 2012.

36 This is the case with comments regarding the integration of immigrants (whether inadequate or not) that are often made on the right wing of the political spectrum. Yet it would be incorrect to think that foul language is limited to this end of the spectrum. Also on the internet, citizens sometimes let themselves go completely.

Graph 4.6 Share (percent) of Dutch citizens who believe behaviour and morals are deteriorating



Source: SCP Culturele Veranderingen

is a form of *voice* as defined by Albert Hirschman.³⁷ Respondents want to express that they are dissatisfied and are thereby implicitly calling on the political elite to change things. Considered in this manner, it is clear that these complaints are not based on indifference. Rather, they stem from loyalty to the ideal of a decent society. Respondents who feel their moral values are being threatened are the ones who proclaim with the loudest voice that society is moving in the wrong direction.

This hardening of the social climate is also reflected in the attitude towards criminals. Very few Dutch citizens have sympathy for delinquents or believe that rehabilitation is preferable to punishment. A growing group of respondents would like to see criminals punished severely. What is striking is that this attitude is found not only on the right side of the political

37 Hirschman 1970, p. 30-54. In the previous chapter, we said that the number of exit options in the Netherlands has increased significantly in the last half century (chapter 3, section 5), but this is equally applicable to the voice option. In any case, citizens today have many channels through which they can express how dissatisfied they are. They can vote for the opposition in political elections, give their opinions in surveys or polls, take to the streets or protest in some other way, participate in talk shows or complain vehemently on the internet. These are all ways in which citizens can make their voices heard. Partly because of the myriad of options, the discrepancy between formal democracy (elections) and all the other forms of participation is so keenly felt. We will return to this topic in chapter 11, section 8-10.

spectrum. A large portion on the left side of the political spectrum now shares this opinion. Surveys demonstrate that opinions on criminality have indeed become harsher. In 1970, three-quarters of the respondents (75 percent) agreed with the statement that criminals should not be punished but should be cured. This share dropped substantially in subsequent years, representing only 37 percent of the population by 2004. The share of those who had no opinion remained more or less constant, while the percentage of those who rejected this statement clearly rose: from 17 percent in 1970 to 49 percent in 2005. This points to a tougher mentality within the Dutch population. This trend is even more pronounced when it comes to sex offenders. Those who agreed with the statement 'We should not punish sex offenders but instead try to rehabilitate them.' fell from 68 percent in 1970 to 26 percent around 2004. In the 1980s, this percentage declined more sharply than the decline in compassion for criminals in general. This may have something to do with the considerable amount of attention given to sexual violence in that period. The vulnerability of women and children received increasing attention in the wake of the second feminist wave. Since then, governments and professionals have more actively pursued cases involving matters such as domestic violence. These examples are not isolated phenomena; rather, they fit in with a broader trend, namely a growing concern for victims and a more general sense of vulnerability among the Dutch population as a whole.³⁸

Has the social mood also influenced what the judiciary does? The fact is that, over time, criminal sentences have become more severe. The Dutch legal system takes pains to refrain from curtailing citizens' freedoms and tends to protect the suspect. This is due to the structure of the process, what counts as admissible evidence, the independent position of the judge and the way in which the truth is established within the legal domain. These factors mean that any increase in aggression in society does not immediately lead to a tightening of criminal law. At the same time, judges and lawyers do not live in a bubble. Partly through their professional networks and partly through their personal experiences, they cannot help but be affected by the public mood. Thus it may be the case that Dutch judges, while trying to maintain their independence and relying on their professional conscience, react with some delay to what is happening in society. This is illustrated by the increase in the number of people convicted. While the number of deaths as a result of murder or manslaughter has changed very little in the past forty years, the number of convicted persons has increased significantly. This

38 A classic study of this is Boutellier 1993; see also 2002.

suggests that the judiciary is reacting in its own way to what is happening in society. We see a similar trend in the severity of the penalties and the lengthy prison sentences that are more frequently being imposed.³⁹

Last but not least, the development of an assertive lifestyle has contributed to the hardening of the social climate. There are two sides to the increased sense of self-esteem among citizens. The assertive lifestyle leads on the one hand to more individual freedom and autonomy, but on the other hand to less understanding or empathy when dealing with others. An interesting illustration of this is the often-heard complaint about increased aggression in road traffic. It is striking that the mistakes always seem to be made by the *other* road users.⁴⁰ This is typical of a narcissistic attitude, which grants oneself certain liberties but leads to irritation when others do the same. That this attitude is becoming more prevalent can be gleaned from an expression that has become quite popular in the Netherlands in the last ten years. In explaining their surly or aggressive reaction to the behaviour of others, many people admit that they have 'a short fuse'. This indicates that the tendency towards narcissism – already identified in the United States – also exists in the Netherlands.⁴¹

7 Decline in tolerance

Clearly, the developments described above have put pressure on citizens' level of tolerance.⁴² Whether we are talking about nuisance caused by drunken youths or an increase in serious crimes, we see that this calls forth a swift rejection of such behaviour. This is illustrated in the cross-national survey known as the *European Values Study*. Respondents were asked who

39 Driessen 2008, p. 49.

40 This raises a telling asymmetry between offenders and victims. When Slotegraaf conducted research twenty years ago into aggressive behaviour in road traffic, three-quarters of the respondents said that they had encountered such behaviour. Respondents complained repeatedly about drivers cutting off cars after passing, driving through red lights, driving in the emergency lane, braking too late, not keeping sufficient distance with the car ahead of them, and failing to yield the right of way. When the victims were asked whether they themselves might have given rise to that aggressive behaviour, only 19 percent responded in the positive. The offenders viewed the case in an entirely different manner: in 63 percent of the cases, the perpetrators pointed to the victims as the immediate cause of their own aggressive behaviour (Slotegraaf 1993, p. 26-31).

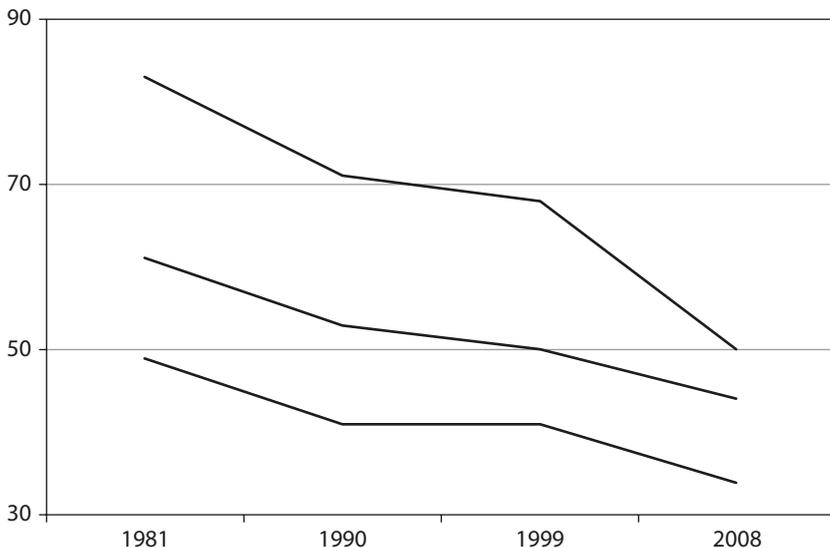
41 In addition to Lasch's classic study (1978), Baumeister (1997), Twenge & Campbell (2009) and Hayes (2012) have also called attention to this phenomenon.

42 Van den Brink & De Ruijter 2013, p. 51-68.

they would not like to have as neighbours and were given a list of various groups of people such as heavy drinkers, emotionally unstable people and political extremists. The survey answers in the Netherlands indicate that very few respondents would object to immigrants or people of another race as neighbours. But the situation changes when the neighbours deviate from the normal pattern on other points. Dutch citizens have more of a problem now than they did in 1981 with neighbours who have a large family, have a criminal past, are emotionally unstable, are heavy drinkers, or are political extremists. Graph 4.7 shows the changes in the responses for three of these deviations. The tolerance for neighbours who are heavy drinkers (lower line), left-wing extremists (middle line) and have a criminal record (upper line) have all declined over the years. In other words, while the Netherlands may consider itself an open and tolerant society, in reality we have become much less hospitable since the 1980s, at least when it comes to fellow citizens who in one way or another (might) cause a nuisance and who have settled in our immediate vicinity.

The Netherlands is certainly not alone in experiencing this decrease in tolerance. The same trend is observed in many European countries. If

Graph 4.7 Share (percent) of Dutch citizens who have no objection to neighbours who have a criminal record (upper line), are left-wing extremists (middle line) or are heavy drinkers (lower line)



Source: EVS 1981-2009

we combine all the responses to the questions on new neighbours into a single measure, we find that intolerance in Europe around the turn of the millennium had risen by 18 percentage points compared to 1991. There are some remarkable differences across countries. In a number of countries, the score for intolerance is rising sharply, while in others the increase remains below the European average. The list of least tolerant countries is topped by France, followed by Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, Iceland, England and the Netherlands. A number of these countries are classified in the literature as 'high trust societies' or societies in which people generally have a significant amount of trust in each other.⁴³ The opposite is the case for countries in southern and eastern Europe, where the rise in intolerance towards new neighbours is not as steep as in northern Europe, but what is striking is that citizens in these countries have very little trust in each other. We are therefore faced with the puzzling fact that tolerance for deviant people is declining in countries that have a high level of mutual trust and that are relatively modern, while the less modern countries where citizens have little trust in each other show more flexibility towards deviant persons. Upon reflection, this pattern is only puzzling if one believes that the process of modernisation automatically leads to more tolerance. If one assumes the opposite, then the pieces of the puzzle fit perfectly: because a modern society puts high demands on the behaviour of all citizens, antisocial behaviour and other forms of deviating conduct result in a relatively high degree of annoyance.

Thus we see that, precisely due to increasingly higher expectations, modern society is afflicted with new forms of nuisances. We are talking here about one of the unintended (and perhaps unwanted) consequences of a process in which the normative bar is increasingly set higher. Even when a large portion of the population conforms to this higher norm, there will be certain groups that deviate from this norm in a positive or a negative sense.⁴⁴ We usually do not have any problems with positive deviations, but for negative deviations the opposite is true. People or groups who care little about what society (or a majority within society) sees as normal often evoke anger or indignation. Partly because of this, the upgrading of societal norms cannot be dismissed as an innocuous matter. It means that new 'problems' automatically emerge and that behaviours that were previously considered normal become a source of irritation.

43 Dekker et al. 2004, p. 10-24.

44 Van den Brink 2004, p. 10-16.

8 The immigrant problem

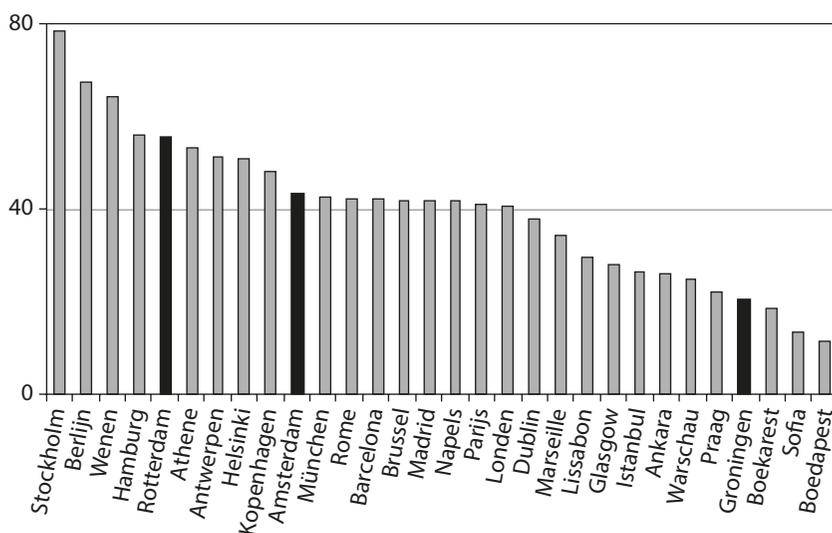
This gradual upgrading of societal norms has also had implications for the position of immigrants in modern society: they have encountered increasing pressure to adapt.⁴⁵ After several intellectuals such as Frits Bolkestein, Paul Schnabel and Paul Scheffer warned that the immigrant issue was a ticking time bomb, the issue was definitively put on the political agenda by Pim Fortuyn. As a columnist, he succeeded in shocking Dutch public opinion on sensitive subjects such as multiculturalism. His short but intense political career caused the national mood to change so much so that, from 2001, cultural differences were no longer allowed to be disguised, tensions between immigrant and native Dutch were blatantly expressed, and fears or frustrations were openly aired. Clearly, the shock resulting from the terrorist attacks in New York and Madrid and the murder of Theo van Gogh also played a role in heightening the pressure on immigrants, but it would be incorrect to assume that these incidents were the sole cause. There were also public, moral and intellectual reasons for the Dutch to view the relationship between 'us' and 'them' from a new perspective. The intensified interaction of different cultural traditions within a highly developed urban society such as the Netherlands led to a nationwide debate on national identity, the separation of church and state, and the extent to which citizenship presupposed the acceptance of certain norms or values.⁴⁶

How fruitful was this debate? What we can say is that the collective anger within Dutch society lasted for at least ten years, leading to far-reaching consequences for both national politics and the urban reality, as demonstrated by the electoral success of the far-right PVV. The conclusion reached by many is that the Netherlands has developed xenophobic traits and that fewer and fewer citizens treat 'others' with respect. This is recognised by Dutch natives as well as immigrants. The latter group often draws a none-too-favourable comparison between the present situation and the atmosphere they experienced shortly after their arrival in the Netherlands. They remember the mixture of curiosity and interest at the time, the help that was spontaneously offered to them, the flexibility with which the authorities went about their business, and more generally the friendly welcome extended to them. They complain that this tolerant Netherlands has disappeared, that they are being put under pressure, and that they

45 Van den Brink 2009, p. 3-11.

46 See in particular Van den Brink & De Ruijter 2006, Van den Brink 2007a and 2007b, Van den Brink 2009.

Graph 4.8 Share (percent) of the population that is dissatisfied with the extent to which immigrants are integrated into urban life



Source: European Commission 2009

are increasingly discriminated against.⁴⁷ In response, certain immigrants retreat into their own identity. Similar observations are made by native Dutch people who witness the many immigrant youth falling into a life of crime, a relatively high level of unemployment among immigrants, and many processes of social exclusion. Moreover, they suspect that immigrants often encounter discrimination.⁴⁸

Although we recognise the seriousness of these problems, we favour another explanation. It is significant that social and moral expectations have gone up across the board, with the sharpest rise taking place in the most modern parts of Europe. A large portion of the immigrants who settled in the northwest of Europe from the 1960s came from either southern Europe or a region that was culturally further away. These immigrants had to bridge a significant distance not only geographically but also socio-culturally. There is a considerable difference between life in Greece, Turkey or Morocco and the society that developed in countries such as Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. One can look upon this contrast in different ways. Optimists will point out that modernity is not the monopoly of northwest Europe and

47 Verplanke 2006, p. 175-183.

48 This presumption is partly justified, as evidenced by WRR 2007, p. 108-116.

that the process of modernisation is also taking place in southern and eastern Europe. Pessimists would say that there are significant differences in the pace of modernisation and that it is extremely difficult for the immigrants in northwest Europe to find their way in modern society. Be that as it may, the tensions at the heart of the northwest European region are none the less significant. This is illustrated in Graph 4.8, which shows how the population in a number of European cities feel about the integration of minorities.⁴⁹ In places such as Stockholm, Berlin, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Helsinki or Copenhagen, there is deep dissatisfaction, while the situation in places such as Istanbul, Ankara, Prague, Bucharest, Sofia and Budapest is almost the opposite. All this underlines the fact that socio-cultural differences in the most modern parts of Europe are quite significant on a relative basis.

9 Moral uncertainty

This influx of immigrants has amplified the cultural diversity of the Netherlands but didn't create it. Let us not forget that from the 1960s, the country had been developing in the direction of a more diverse and dynamic society, one that was strongly oriented towards the individual. This meant that a number of moral values and traditions came under pressure.⁵⁰ A relevant question is how the population reacted to this. Was this development accepted by everyone, or did it meet with resistance? And how did the reactions differ?

We are able to answer these questions because this subject has been explicitly researched by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, or SCP) since the 1960s. Respondents were asked whether they could make a clear distinction between good and evil.

49 The graph is based on: European Commission (2009), State of European Cities Report (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_277_en.pdf) dated 17-2-2012.

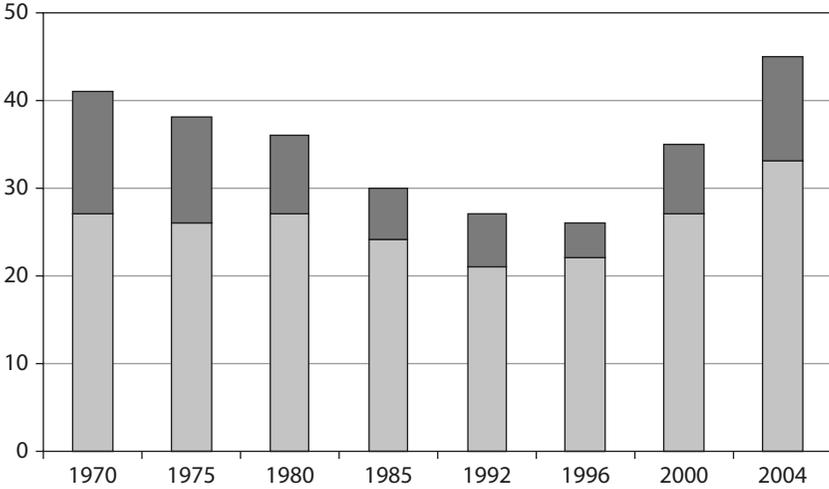
50 The processes of emancipation and individualisation in the Netherlands are often pointed to as a sign of progress. No one wants to go back to a situation in which they were subjected to the social control of the church, the family or the neighbourhood, certainly not when it comes to how to structure their private lives. And yet at the same time there are complaints about the erosion of values, the loss of community and the increase in selfishness. It is as though the Dutch want to be in control of their own existence and at the same time need community building at another level. Much of the sociological literature considers these two desires as contradictory. In the train of thought that we are developing in this book, however, the two desires go very well together. Indeed, in our opinion the mix of individual competition and social cooperation forms the basis of our human existence, although in reality this may take different shapes and forms.

They were also asked to indicate whether they thought there was too much diversity in opinions on good and evil within the population and whether these opinions were changing too rapidly. The results show that, for a long time, most people did not have a problem with a certain moral dynamic. Graph 4.9 indicates that the share of those uneasy with the pace of change gradually declined until the mid-1990s. In 1970, 41 percent thought that opinions on good and evil in the Netherlands were changing too rapidly, while in the mid-1990s that share was only 26 percent. In other words, the development towards modern, more liberal ideas was endorsed by a growing majority. But thereafter we see a change, with the number of respondents who expressed their unease rising again. This change occurred within a relatively short time period. In the last year in which the survey was held, more Dutch citizens rejected this moral dynamic than at the beginning of the survey. This is not only the case with the question of whether ideas about good and evil change too quickly. We see the same development in the question of whether there is too much moral diversity in the Netherlands.

It is tempting to explain this striking (but ongoing) change in thinking on the basis of certain economic, social or political circumstances, but this is not an easy task. The Dutch economy flourished in the 1990s, and while there were cyclical fluctuations in economic growth, there was no crisis. On the political front, what may have played a role is the fact that at the beginning of the 1990s the Christian Democrats were excluded from the government for the first time in many years. But this can hardly explain why the rejection of moral relativism persisted throughout the decade and into the new century, when the Christian Democrats once again joined the government. On the social front, a certain dissatisfaction with the multicultural society may have played a role. In the mid-1990s, approximately one-third of the Dutch population rejected the idea that national traditions or symbols should be toned down. This was rarely openly expressed and would only begin to make itself heard after 2000.⁵¹ We are also reluctant to attribute the change in thinking to the terrorist attacks

51 Research from 1996 by the SCP shows that 70 percent of the respondents believed the Netherlands was a better country than most other countries, 57 percent felt we should protect typical Dutch lifestyles, and 46 percent thought we should respect national symbols such as the flag and the national anthem. In the public domain, expressions of national pride were immediately considered suspect. In fact, the right-minded segment of the nation has focused fully on a 'cosmopolitan' agenda of ongoing globalisation and internationalisation. The price for disregarding the national sentiments among the electorate was paid several years later when the political world was taken by complete surprise by the rapid rise of Pim Fortuyn and other politicians who followed in his footsteps.

Graph 4.9 Respondents (percent) who on the whole (light grey) or very much (dark grey) agree with the statement that opinions on good and evil change too quickly



Source: SCP Culturele Veranderingen (Cultural Changes Survey)

in New York and Madrid, which are often cited to explain the emergence of a more conservative trend throughout the West. While these events have undeniably strengthened the longing for more traditional values, they do not explain why the change in thinking began five years earlier.

In our view, the belief that opinions on good and evil were changing too rapidly was a spontaneous reaction triggered precisely by the tendency towards moral relativism in the preceding period. This mechanism can be considered a form of ‘moral defence’, similar to the way the immune system protects our bodies against viruses and other threats.⁵² We will

52 This metaphor of the immune system is not new. One century ago, Sigmund Freud realised that patients activated certain ‘defence mechanisms’ in order to shield themselves against the emotional conflicts they were suffering from. Later psychoanalysts made distinctions between several defence mechanisms such as repression, regression, projection, introjection, idealisation and sublimation (Laplanche & Pontalis 1975, p. 24-34). It would be worthwhile to examine whether such mechanisms also play a role at the collective level when it comes to the tension between morality and modernity. It would be interesting to examine a movement such as the ‘moral rearmament’ which originated in the 1930s and became influential in the Netherlands after the Second World War (De Loor 1986) or the ‘ethical awakening’ that was introduced by then Minister of Justice Dries van Agt in the mid-1970s. Interestingly, military metaphors are often used with this theme, reminding us that modernisation sometimes puts things at risk, which then must be defended.

come back to the way in which this mechanism works later in this book. For now, we would simply remark that there are apparently limits to the variation in moral ideas. The fact that opinions about good and evil change or that certain groups have very different opinions does not have to be a problem in modern society. It is, however, a question of degree. As soon as the moral dynamic or the degree of diversity exceeds a certain point, a sense of threat emerges which leads people to embrace traditional values.⁵³ A new balance is then sought in which the new values are not completely rejected – instead, society opts for a certain counterbalance. It is noteworthy that a similar process has taken place in the area of leadership. For many years, support among Dutch citizens for strong leaders had been declining. This is a development that fits well with the rise of democratic values in a modern society. But in the mid-1990s, this development began to stagnate, and more and more respondents began to embrace the idea of a strong leader. At first glance, this turnabout is inconsistent with a number of modern values that have become increasingly popular in the Netherlands since the 1960s. And yet the call for strong leadership has been going on for more than ten years.

10 Conclusions

In this chapter, we looked at phenomena that point to a retrenchment or even an erosion of moral sentiments. At first glance, it appears as though the modernisation of the Netherlands had two neutral consequences. First, it eroded the societal significance of the church, with the result that the number of Dutch people affiliated with a church declined sharply from the 1960s. Moreover, religious life underwent substantial changes. This, together with the rise in the level of prosperity and the increase in the possibilities of consumption, brought an end to the shadow that the Christian tradition had long cast over corporeality. In its wake, a culture began to emerge that was heavily focused on enjoyment and vitality. This led to an increase in attention for a fit and healthy body and to a rise in the number of citizens

53 This is consistent with Emile Durkheim's fundamental insight into the function that deviant behaviour fulfils for a social community. The laying down of norms and the violation of those norms are inextricably linked with each other. It is the deviation from a social norm that makes it clear for the majority (once again) where the norm lies. And it is the (often fierce) reaction of the majority to the violation that reinstates the norm (Durkheim 2014). Incidentally, 'majorities' are still highly relevant even in a modern society such as the Netherlands (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp 2004).

engaged in sports. It would be an exaggeration to see these developments as a threat to moral sentiments.

What is more important from the perspective of this book is that, due to modernisation, a more assertive lifestyle has developed in the Netherlands in recent decades. This lifestyle can be characterised as one in which citizens have a greater sense of self-esteem and focus on individual autonomy rather than empathy with others. In practice, this often goes hand in hand with a large but fragile ego: such an ego is mortally offended at the slightest occurrence. This does not need to be a problem as long as one can exercise a measure of self-restraint. But it is precisely on this point that we see a worrying trend in the Netherlands. After the 1960s, more informal forms of social interaction emerged that have had an unpleasant impact on civic life. Dutch society is now paying the price for the decreased attention given to discipline and obedience in child-rearing. The emphasis on providing children with 'rest, regularity and rules of hygiene' began to disappear, and at the same time we see that outside of the family, a culture of physical experiences has developed. More and more people in the Netherlands began to seek out intense experiences in their leisure time, often helped by the ingestion of alcohol and/or other stimulants. The increased consumption of alcohol was not limited to adults: over the years, the age at which Dutch youth first began to drink alcohol dropped, while the number of cases of drunkenness increased considerably. This clearly inhibits the capacity for self-restraint, with the result that since the 1970s civic life has been increasingly marred by aggressive behaviour. Between 1970 and 2005, the number of registered violent crimes per 100,000 inhabitants rose by a factor of five, while instances of vandalism and disturbances of the public order increased by a factor of nine. It is not surprising that Dutch citizens frequently complain about the coarsening of manners. Some two-thirds of the public say that Dutch society is moving in the wrong direction. Compared with thirty years ago, most people have much less sympathy for criminals or other antisocial elements who flout the rules of society. The judges in the country have taken this discontent to heart, as evidenced by the higher number of convictions and heavier sentences. Everything points to a hardening of the social climate in the Netherlands.

And yet we would warn our readers against drawing such a severe conclusion. It is not clear whether the experience of coarser manners is entirely based on an actual increase in aggression. It can also be the result of a change in the norms held by society. And that does seem to be the case in modern society – in part due to the more assertive lifestyle adopted by citizens. In chapter 3, we already noted the phenomenon of gradually

increasing expectations. Certain behaviours that were considered common or normal in the 1950s or 1960s are simply no longer accepted today. Consider, for example, the way in which some men interacted with women in those days, how minorities were treated, and the more general disregard for people in vulnerable positions. The process of modernisation has in effect led to a greater sensitivity towards victims. A striking example of this is the approach to child abuse, which is far more vigilant today than was the case several decades ago. Professional hotlines have been set up, which has led to an automatic rise in the number of victims of child abuse. This does not mean that today's parents are more prone to hit their children but rather that there is better oversight and earlier interventions in such situations. This kind of dynamic presents itself in many areas of modern life. This is why we must recognise that the upgrading of societal norms cannot be dismissed as an innocuous matter. It means that new forms of public nuisance will repeatedly arise and that the acceptance of deviant behaviour will gradually decline. This has implications for criminal statistics: when youth mischief is described as a crime, when citizens are more readily inclined to report to the police, and when the police take greater care in registering criminal offenses, then this will sooner or later show up as an increase in the number of registered violent crimes. Aside from the statistics, these mechanisms also have an impact on how ordinary citizens interact with each other. This explains why Dutch people increasingly object to neighbours with a 'problem'. Compared with the situation thirty years ago, they have less and less tolerance for people who deviate in some way from the norm. And this is also reflected in the hardening of the social climate.

It is an illusion to believe that there is a simple solution to this problem, as it concerns the fundamentally ambivalent relationship between modernity and morality. This is evident from the way in which the Dutch public has reacted to changes in moral values. It is not a problem for modern society that opinions on good and evil change or that there are groups of citizens who hold divergent views. However, it is a question of degree. Once the moral dynamic or the diversity in opinions exceeds certain limits, citizens find this threatening and end up defending more traditional values. In the Netherlands, this turnaround in the tolerance of a diversity of opinions occurred in the mid-1990s and came replete with a call for strong leaders. It is revealing that we see similar tendencies in other northwest European countries. This indicates that it is precisely the democratic, relatively modern societies that appear to be subject to such a 'conservative' turn. Unlike many who consider this conservative backlash strange in modern societies, we suspect that this backlash and modernity are in fact deeply interconnected.

This is apparent from several related phenomena we mentioned above, such as the remarkable fact that the likelihood of becoming a victim of a violent crime is the highest in northwest Europe or the no less remarkable fact that intolerance towards neighbours with a 'problem' is the highest in this region. It is precisely the high standards of modern society that lead to people with certain deviations being considered a danger, a problem or a nuisance. This also explains why people in this region complain so much about the lack of integration of immigrants. Apparently, these societies have reached the limits of their normative elasticity. One can dismiss this as a form of moral panic, but it would make more sense for us to realise that this reveals an inherent tension between modernity and morality.

Part 3

5 The truly important things in life

Paul Dekker, Erik van Ingen & Loek Halman

In the previous chapters, we argued that moral sentiments have become less significant in the public domain. Many Dutch citizens say that they experience a certain hardening of the social climate or even an increase in aggressive behaviour. In this chapter, we examine the extent to which moral values have eroded in their private lives. To determine what values or ideals Dutch citizens consider important, we conducted a survey in 2010 in which we asked respondents how they viewed the concept of 'something higher', defined as *the imagination of a whole to which I feel committed and that motivates me to act in an altruistic way*.¹ We wanted to see whether their answers could be linked to certain values of a religious or spiritual nature and also whether they could be linked to the way in which they put their ideals into practice. The respondents' socio-demographic details and their recent views on social and political affairs were already available, which allowed us to keep the survey short.² The questionnaire began with a series of questions about the respondents' personal values. We then asked some questions about religion, followed by a few questions about volunteer work. In the final section of the survey, we explicitly asked for their views on the concept of 'something higher'.

In presenting the results of the survey, we have reversed the sequence that was used in the questionnaire. We first share the respondents' explanations of their understanding of the concept of 'something higher' (section 1), and we illustrate this with a few examples (section 2). We then link this

¹ We repeat here what was briefly explained at the end of chapter 1, namely that our research was primarily about the fate of how the concept of 'something higher' was viewed in the Netherlands. We described 'something higher' as: *the imagination of a whole to which I feel committed and that motivates me to act in an altruistic way*. Although this concept is about more than just moral values, there is a clear relationship with moral sentiments in the sense that Adam Smith wrote about. Both the concept of altruistic behaviour and the importance of the ability to imagine are explicitly dealt with in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (see chapter 1, sections 1-3).

² Respondents to our survey had participated in January 2010 in a survey for the Citizens' Outlook Barometer (*Continu Onderzoek Burgerperspectieven*, or COB), an ongoing study conducted by the Netherlands Institute of Social Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, or SCP); see www.scp.nl. The 1,081 respondents of that survey – all of whom were 18 years and older – are a representative sample of the Dutch population. We asked them at the end of February 2010 to participate in a follow-up study, either via the internet or with a written questionnaire. This resulted in 775 completed surveys at the end of March.

to something already discussed in chapter 2, where we made a distinction between values of a sacred, social and vital nature (section 3). An important point is whether these results can be tied in with the level of interest in the church in the Netherlands (section 4) or to a more spiritual interest (section 5). After outlining the socio-demographic backgrounds underlying the different views on the concept of 'something higher' (section 6), we ask about our respondents' willingness to help others. We discuss the different forms of volunteer work that exist in the Netherlands (section 7), the motives that play a role in volunteering (section 8) and the socio-demographic characteristics of these volunteers (section 9). We conclude that the Dutch not only adhere to moral values, many also act on them as well (section 10).

1 Many deflective reactions

It is not easy to get people to discuss a notion as vague as 'something higher'. This is made all the more difficult when a questionnaire is involved, which doesn't allow for the possibility of verbally clarifying one's answer or asking questions when the questionnaire is unclear. We therefore first conducted a pilot survey, and after much discussion about the results, we decided to use two variants of the question regarding 'something higher'. The first version links the concept of 'something higher' to 'that which is truly important in life', while the second makes the link with 'that which makes a person truly happy'.

The two versions of the question were randomly distributed among the respondents. Of the 570 respondents who filled out the questionnaire on the internet and the 205 respondents who completed the questionnaire on paper, about half received the first question and the other half received the second question. 389 respondents were asked the following:

In conversations about *what is truly important in life (or what gives life meaning)*, some people talk about matters that are 'higher' than satisfying one's direct needs or pursuing one's material interests. Do you believe there is something higher when it comes to what is truly important in your life or what gives your life meaning?

The respondents could answer 'no', 'yes' or 'I don't know'. Those who answered 'no' received the following follow-up question: 'Can you try to indicate what is truly important in your life (or what gives your life meaning)?' Those who answered 'yes' received the following question: 'Can you

try to indicate what this higher thing is for you?' Those who answered 'I don't know' did not receive a follow-up question. The remaining 386 respondents were asked the following:

In conversations about *what makes a person truly happy*, some people talk about matters that are 'higher' than simply satisfying one's direct needs or pursuing one's material interests. Do you believe there is something higher when it comes to what makes you truly happy?

Once again, respondents could answer 'no', 'yes' or 'I don't know'. Those who answered 'no' received the following follow-up question: 'Can you try to indicate what makes you truly happy?' Those who answered 'yes' received the following question: 'Can you try to indicate what this higher thing is for you?' Those who answered 'I don't know' did not receive a follow-up question. Both the paper questionnaire and the internet version included a large text box that was designed to encourage respondents to give detailed answers.

Although this method with two variants to the same question may appear complicated, we had to take into account the fact that some people do have ideas about what makes them happy or what is important for them even though they may distance themselves from a phrase such as 'something higher'. From the responses we received, this was clearly the case. The advantage of the method we chose is that it provides space both for answers in which people explicitly elaborate on what they consider to be something higher and for answers to the question of what is truly important or what makes people truly happy without having to use the term 'something higher'. In order to avoid confusion, we used the term 'the most essential' in place of 'something higher' in follow-up questions when the respondent answered 'no' to the questions quoted above.

What immediately strikes us in table 5.1 is that the question regarding the existence of 'something higher' was answered positively by only a minority of the respondents. In the first variant (something higher as 'something that is truly important in life'), 39 percent answered 'yes' and in the second variant (something higher as 'something that makes a person truly happy'), no more than 28 percent answered 'yes'. Those who answered 'no' for these variants represented 33 and 44 percent respectively of the total number of respondents. Approximately one-quarter of the respondents said they didn't know (29 and 27 percent respectively). These percentages indicate that any belief in something higher would more likely have been detected by asking people what they find essential in life than by asking what makes them happy.

Table 5.1 Responses to questions regarding ‘something higher’ (in percent)^a

	yes	no	don't know	N =
Do you believe in something higher in the sense of something that is truly important in your life?	39	33	29	389
Do you believe in something higher in the sense of something that makes you truly happy?	28	44	27	386

^a In this chapter, we report exclusively on the weighted data, i.e. data that are made representative based on several socio-demographic characteristics.

The answer also influenced the length of the comments given in the text box. Those who believed in something higher used an average of 123 characters (first variant) and 118 characters (second variant) in their comments. Those who did not believe in something higher but who did leave a comment limited themselves to an average of 81 and 91 characters respectively. This average, however, does not tell us much because there was a substantial difference in the number of characters used. Some felt a single word was sufficient (‘God’, ‘peace’, ‘happiness’, ‘health’, etc.), while others gave an extensive explanation.³

2 Examples of views regarding ‘something higher’

More interesting than the length of the comments is, of course, the content. How did our respondents interpret the notion of ‘something higher’? Do their explanations differ based on the version they received? Before attempting to answer these questions, we give a few examples below of the kinds of comments respondents sent in. We have chosen six detailed answers that offer insights into the diversity and combinations of considerations.⁴ To give you an idea of the person behind the comment, we have indicated (in parentheses following the quote) their gender, age, highest level of education

3 Responses of up to 250 characters were not uncommon, but thereafter the number of characters declines significantly. There were seventeen responses with more than 300 characters, the majority of which were devotional texts.

4 In this chapter we maintained the spoken language for all quotations, but typing and spelling errors were corrected and punctuation marks sometimes added.

completed, and religious affiliation. We present them in order of ascending age of the respondents:

- 1 'The most important in one's life is to figure out that we sin every day, that we are full of sins and that we have an intuitive understanding of this. And if we think that we wretched people can no longer be helped, hope that God will look after us. By the way, we really don't become blessed just by doing good deeds or the like!!!! The real reason for our existence is to become a child of God.' (*woman, 30, secondary vocational education, Christian, in response to what she considers to be something higher when it comes to what is truly important in life*).
- 2 'I don't have a family, but I do find it important to do something for others or for society. After all, one does not live alone in this world. Through my job and my volunteer work, I try to contribute in my own modest way to a better environment and a better world. In addition, I believe happiness and satisfaction can be found in everyday things, however much of a cliché that is. I do not strive for a higher goal – that is unattainable in my view, so it's better to focus on the things that you can achieve.' (*woman, 37, higher vocational education, non-churchgoer, in response to what she considers to be something higher when it comes to what is truly important in life, after indicating that in her opinion there is nothing higher*).
- 3 'There is on the one hand God, but I forget to ask for help when it comes to truly important things. In addition, there is also helping other people. I do that by providing a financial donation for research at the Dutch Cancer Society. And in my work in social services, I also help others, by ensuring that everyone gets a basic income and the corresponding services, or by helping them to receive the benefits to which they are entitled; and pointing people to the right arrangements and facilities. If you can help someone out of financial distress, that is a great feeling.' (*man, 42, higher vocational education, member of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, in response to what he considers to be something higher when it comes to what is truly important in life*).
- 4 'A peaceful, harmonious life. A life without financial deficits. An open relationship in which everything is negotiable. Material possessions: by this I mean that you're surrounded by nice things that make your life enjoyable. A relationship without a lot of hassle, in which the partners also have time for their own things, separate from each other.' (*man, 46, secondary vocational education, non-churchgoer, in response to what he considers to be something higher when it comes to what is truly important in life, after indicating that in his opinion there is nothing higher*).

- 5 'Yes, to appreciate and have respect for one another. We are not more and not less than another person. We are all laid down to rest with our noses facing upwards, and then you can only put on a suit (or a dress if you are a woman) [before they lay you in the coffin]. Some people leave an inheritance behind and then the family members quarrel, but it would be better to leave behind appreciation and a good feeling about you. That's far more important than all the money. And enjoy life, for you are dead for longer than you are alive, so you should just be human and dare to make mistakes.' (*man, 61, primary education, non-churchgoer, in response to what he considers to be something higher when it comes to what is truly important in life*).
- 6 'To live in – and seek out – harmony, both with my immediate surroundings (family, friends, nature) and with the wider world (the cosmos, people in other parts of the world, their way of life and religion), and to share this with other people, but also to be alone and to try to find answers to questions – after all, those answers can be found within ourselves.' (*woman, 78, high school education, non-Christian religious group, in response to what she considers to be something higher when it comes to what makes a person truly happy*).

As one can see, the answers are very diverse. They range from a very Christian view of 'something higher' to faith in a God that does exist but is forgotten when it comes to truly important things and even to a secular creed. Some write about finding happiness in small things and about searching for peace within oneself; others write about the desire to do something for one's fellow human being. Certain responses adopt a single perspective (such as the first, in which a religious belief is expressed), while there are also responses where the pursuit of happiness in one's immediate circle is combined with the desire to do something for the larger world. The background information on each respondent is on the whole unsurprising but occasionally does take one by surprise.⁵ It appears that moral commitment today is a matter of individual preferences – preferences that are, moreover, remarkably diverse.

5 The results underline yet again the definitive end of the era of pillarisation in the Netherlands. In that period, large segments of social life (churches, political parties, interest groups, leisure activities, newspapers and the like) were organised along religious or ideological divisions. A classic analysis of this 'system' can be found in Lijphart 1982; see also Van der Laarse 1989 and Righart 1986.

Table 5.2 Type of response to questions regarding something higher (in percent)

	reli- gious	social	vital	quotid- ian	at least 1	N = 100%
Response to:						
1) something important, nothing higher	6	71	48	21	99	(92)
2) something important, something higher	50	57	18	6	98	(131)
3) true happiness, nothing higher	6	70	51	28	99	(142)
4) true happiness, something higher	42	50	30	9	97	(94)
all respondents with a comment	26	62	37	17	98	(459)
all respondents	15	37	22	10	58	(775)

Example: Row 1 shows the percentage of respondents who commented on what is truly important in life without indicating this as something higher. Of these, 6 percent can be categorised as religious, 71 percent as social, 48 percent as vital and 21 percent as commonplace. The four categories do not add up to 100 percent because they are not mutually exclusive. The second-to-last column on the right shows that at least one of these four value types can be ascribed to 99 percent of the comments pertaining to this row.

3 Four types of ideals

Our survey resulted in a total of 462 different comments on the concept of ‘something higher’. We grouped these according to the three kinds of value types we discussed in chapter 2: religious, social and vital values. We were able to associate most of the survey responses with one of these three value types, but for some cases we had to create a separate category. We describe this latter category as ‘quotidian’ because it includes explanations that refer to ordinary business and fundamental requirements. The following four categories are used in this chapter:

- Religious = religious, spiritual
- Social = altruism, loved ones, social relations
- Vital = self-realisation, health, hedonism
- Quotidian = everyday things, fundamental requirements

Table 5.2 shows how the survey responses are distributed among the four types. Before moving on to our interpretation of these responses, we must mention that not all participants in our survey seized the opportunity

to leave a comment. The final row in table 5.2 shows that 58 percent of them subscribe to at least one of the four value types. Of the remaining 42 percent, a few responded in such a way that their comment could not be categorised properly, a larger number of respondents left no comment at all, and an even larger number could not leave a comment because they had responded 'I don't know', which meant that we did not ask them a follow-up question. When we use certain percentages in the rest of this chapter, we have to realise that there is a significant group of people who for various reasons did not come out either for or against one of the four value types given here. This does not mean that they would reject these values if they were presented to them on another occasion. When a respondent does not express a value, we cannot conclude that the unmentioned value is genuinely absent.

We derive the following conclusions from table 5.2. To begin with, we examine how the four main categories involving something higher as well as the most essential are distributed among the Dutch population. The responses that we associate with the religious (column 1) were given most often by people who say they believe in something higher, of whom 50 percent point to what is truly important in life and 42 percent to what makes a person truly happy. For the responses that we associate with the social (column 2), the reverse applies: here the highest shares are of those who reject the notion of something higher (71 and 70 percent). A similar situation can be seen in the responses that we associate with the vital (column 3), where the highest percentages are found within the group of people who do not believe in something higher (48 and 51 percent). The same holds for the responses that we group under quotidian (column 4), where the highest percentages are found within the group of people who do not believe in something higher (21 and 28 percent). In other words, thinking in terms of something higher is still related to religion or spirituality in the opinion of the Dutch population. But this does not mean that those who reject the notion of something higher do not have ideas about what they consider to be truly important in life or what makes a person truly happy.

Finally, notice that the four possible categories are distributed in an unequal manner. If we take the four categories together (shown in the second-to-last row of table 5.2), we see that social values are mentioned the most (62 percent of all respondents with a comment). This is followed by values of a vital and religious nature (37 and 26 percent respectively),

while the quotidian values are cited the least (17 percent). This distribution is broadly consistent with the findings of other scholars.⁶

4 The link to religion

In this section, we examine how the results of our survey relate to certain aspects of religious life. We realise that religion is a broad term that refers not only to transcendental ideas or sentiments of individuals but also to collective customs and institutional characteristics. In our study, we can only discuss a few of these aspects. In the SCP survey that preceded our survey, respondents were already asked about their religious participation: they were asked whether they were members of a church or other religious group and how frequently they attended church services. In the present survey, we asked about respondents' religious beliefs without going into any possible relationship they may have with a religious institution. By combining both surveys, we can determine to what extent those beliefs correlate with church membership.

Table 5.3 Typology of church affiliation: four types and their share (percent) within the population

	Church visits	
	Less than once a month	Once a month or more
No membership in a church	Non-church members: 63	Non-denominational churchgoers: 1
Membership in a church	Fringe church members: 17	Frequent churchgoers: 19

6 Compare this with the findings of a study by research firm Motivaction which distinguishes between four types of citizens (Kronjee & Lampert 2006, p. 178-208). The question was what values and ideas play a role when it comes to giving meaning to life. A first group of citizens focuses on social-moral values. They seek meaning on the social front, for example by assigning great significance to members of their own family or friends. A second group believes faith in God or another divine authority is paramount. These people have a considerable interest in spiritual affairs. Citizens in the third group have a hedonistic attitude. These are the so-called 'vitalists' who are very much concerned with their health; who make a deliberate choice for happiness, having fun and conviviality; and willingly live life from one day to the next. Finally, there is a group that Motivaction labels as 'nihilists', who do not believe in anything and are not in search of a deeper meaning in life. Even in this classification, socially oriented citizens are the largest group (42 percent), followed by religious believers (33 percent) and hedonistically oriented citizens (15 percent), while the nihilists represent yet again the smallest group (10 percent).

Regarding church membership, respondents were first asked whether they considered themselves a part of a church or religious group. If the answer was positive, the respondent was asked which church or religious group s/he was a part of. Of the respondents, 36 percent said they belong to a church or a religious community and 64 percent said they do not belong to any religious group. In terms of participation in church services, 20 percent attended church at least once a month, while 80 percent attended less frequently or not at all. We can combine these findings in a typology of church affiliation that is used more often in the Netherlands.⁷ This typology is based on a distinction between four types: 1) non-church members, i.e., people who are not members of a church and seldom or never go to a church; 2) fringe church members, i.e., people who are members of a church but seldom or never go to church; 3) frequent churchgoers, i.e., church members who frequently go to church; and 4) non-denominational churchgoers, or those who go to church without being a member of one. Incidentally, this last category is negligible. Table 5.3 shows how the Dutch population is distributed among these categories. This distribution is consistent with research that other scholars have conducted into this matter. Joep de Hart, for example, concludes that two-thirds of the Dutch population are non-churchgoers, that there are very few non-denominational churchgoers and that the remaining church members are evenly distributed between regular churchgoers and church members who rarely go to church.⁸

A number of questions were asked with regard to religious beliefs. First, we asked whether respondents considered themselves religious. Then we asked about the content of that faith, and finally we determined the degree of spiritual dedication. The figures in table 5.4 show how our respondents responded to the last two questions.⁹

7 Felling et al. 1981, p. 25-81; Felling et al. 1986.

8 De Hart 2011, p. 62-72.

9 Unfortunately, the question of how one sees oneself as a believer was only asked in the right way on the internet version of our survey. Although three-quarters of the respondents answered this version, because this does not represent a random part of the sample, we cannot derive an assessment for the whole population. Given the over-representation of non-religious youth in the internet version, it is remarkable that no less than 41 percent of these respondents characterised themselves as religious and only 8 percent described themselves as a 'convinced atheist'. It is a shame that we can do very little with this question due to a measurement error.

Table 5.4 Responses (in percent) to questions on religious belief and spiritual interest^a

Religious belief	
there is a personal God	24
there is a kind of life spirit or life force	36
no one can know if there is a God or life spirit or life force	19
there is no God or life spirit or life force	12
I don't know	9
Spiritual interest	
very interested	22
somewhat interested	41
not very interested	20
not at all interested	15
I don't know	2

^a For religious belief, we asked: 'Which of the following statements comes closest to your own beliefs?'. For spiritual interest, we asked: 'Regardless of whether or not you consider yourself religious, how spiritual would you say you are, i.e. to what extent are you interested in the sacred or the supernatural?'.

The responses to the first question in table 5.4 allowed us to distinguish between four beliefs regarding God: theists (24 percent of the population believes in a 'personal God'), 'something-ists' or deists¹⁰ (36 percent of the population believes in 'a kind of life spirit or life force'), 'agnostics' (19 percent of the population don't know whether there is such a thing as a God, life spirit or life force) and finally atheists who are also described in the Netherlands as 'nothing-ists' or 'nihilists' (12 percent of the population denies the existence of a God or life force). Given that the first two groups together comprise 60 percent, one can conclude that a majority of the population believes that something 'beyond him or her' (or if you like, something higher) does exist.

The responses to the second question in table 5.4 tells us that one in five respondents are significantly interested in spirituality and that two in five are somewhat interested. This interest in the spiritual is closely bound up with the first two lines in table 5.4, as almost all of those who

¹⁰ 'There are also those who have difficulties with the God they grew up with and therefore change him into a more general supernatural force. We come across such depersonalisations already in the Enlightenment. The people concerned are not without religious ideas (the planet is not sufficient in itself) but they are unsure about what they believe to be an anthropomorphic image of God. We call such believers deists.' (Felling et al. 1986, p. 42).

are interested in spirituality believe in a personal God or in a life force or life spirit. Another interesting fact is that a majority of those who filled out the questionnaire over the internet and who identified themselves as religious were interested in spirituality. Of the non-religious internet group, slightly less than half demonstrated an interest in spirituality. Another conclusion we can draw is that the interpretation of spirituality is evidently still strongly linked to traditional forms of faith. This is underlined by the fact that approximately three-quarters of the respondents who belong to the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (Protestantse Kerk in Nederland, or PKN) were somewhat or very interested in spirituality. The number of members of other denominations or religious groups was too small to be able to draw reliable conclusions.

That church affiliation and religious convictions are closely interrelated will hardly come as a surprise to our readers. Three-quarters of the frequent churchgoers and one-third of the fringe church members believe in a personal God, while among the non-church members only one in twenty believe in a personal God. At the same time, belief in a kind of life force or life spirit is the most popular among the latter two groups (40 percent). Only 20 percent of the respondents who were classified as non-church members firmly reject any God or life force. Those who were somewhat or very interested in 'the sacred and supernatural' amounted to 85 percent of the frequent churchgoers, 71 percent of the fringe church members and 51 percent of the non-church members. More remarkable than the differences is the fact that even among the non-church members, just over half are interested in spirituality. As mentioned earlier, the group of *hard core* atheists is small in the Netherlands.

5 Forms of spirituality

On the basis of these data, we can determine how religious differences are related to the way in which people view the concept of 'something higher' or 'the most essential in life' (see table 5.5). We begin with the influence that membership in a church has on one's beliefs. Faith in something higher is the most common among the frequent churchgoers (64 percent): nearly half of them describe the concept of something higher or the most essential in life as something sacred (45 percent). This description was used much less by the fringe church members and the non-church members. Interestingly, in this regard the difference between these last two groups is very small.

In addition to church affiliation, views on the concept of something higher or the most essential in life are also influenced by certain ideas

Table 5.5 Belief in something higher and views on the most essential, categorised by religious grouping (in percent)

	belief in something higher	views on the most essential			
		sacred	social	vital	quotidian
All	33	15	37	22	10
Frequent churchgoer	64	45	33	14	6
Fringe church member	27	8	37	22	15
Non-church member	25	8	37	24	9
Theists	54	38	29	17	6
Something-ists	34	11	43	21	10
Agnostics	25	6	37	24	14
Atheists	23	3	43	36	10
Spiritually very interested	64	46	35	16	8
Somewhat interested	27	8	39	26	11
Not very interested	23	4	40	21	8
Not at all interested	20	6	36	22	14

about God. If we assume that faith in God weakens as we move along the spectrum from theists via the ‘something-ists’ to the agnostics all the way to the atheists at the other end, we see that belief in something higher steadily diminishes. While 54 percent of the theists believe in something higher, this share is no more than 23 percent among atheists. The same is true for the description of the most essential in life as something sacred: among theists this share is 38 percent, but this drops to 3 percent when it comes to the atheists. This picture is reversed when we look at the description of the most essential in life as something vital: this description is most common among atheists (36 percent) but decreases to 17 percent among the theists. For the description of the most essential as social or quotidian, the correlation was weaker, although the theists still had the lowest score and the atheists were once again on the high side.

Finally, we found that people with a strong interest in the spiritual occupy a special position. Almost two-thirds of them believe that something higher does exist (64 percent), while this percentage is significantly lower among those with less interest in the spiritual (ranging from 27 to 20 percent). Those with a strong spiritual interest are also more inclined than less interested respondents to see the most essential in life in sacred terms (46 percent versus 8 to 6 percent). For the other descriptions, the differences between

the categories were negligible. We do need to realise, however, that those with a great interest in the spiritual are a relatively small group. If we take the Dutch population as a whole, then the most dominant description of the most essential in life is social. Social values score the highest in most groups. Only the frequent churchgoers, the theists and the spiritually interested (groups that strongly overlap) prefer a sacred over a social interpretation of the most essential.

To sum up, we find that religious characteristics have an effect primarily on the words or values that are associated with the sacred. If the most essential in life is interpreted in social, vital or quotidian terms, religion or church affiliation plays almost no role. The notion of something higher turns out to be primarily a sacred matter for believers and frequent churchgoers; while fringe church members and non-church members often recognise that there is something higher, they interpret this in a different way. Ideas about God play a similar role. It is mainly theists for whom the concept of something higher is something sacred, while 'something-ists', agnostics and atheists more often prioritise social or vital values. The same holds for spiritual interest. A sacred interpretation of the higher is found most among the theists, while the other groups tend to interpret the concept of something higher in social or vital terms. This is not surprising, given that the 'spiritual' in the questionnaire was described as the sacred or the supernatural. For many of the spiritually interested, such an interpretation comes close to what one would define as the divine.

6 Social background

How does one's views on the concept of something higher differ between the genders, between young and old, and between people with a lower education and people with a higher education? Table 5.6 shows that men and women differ very little in terms of their belief in something higher. We do see a difference, however, in their responses to the question of whether they believe in a life spirit, a life force or a personal God as well as the question of whether they are interested in spirituality: in both cases, the percentages are higher for women than for men. Age differences in general do not make a difference, although there was a relatively substantial amount of interest in spirituality among the 18-34 age group. What does play a significant role is the differences in levels of education. Those with a lower education differ from those with a higher education in three respects. First, the latter group is more likely to believe in something higher than those with a lower education (49 versus

Table 5.6 Background data (in percent and average number of characters)

	God or spirit ^a	spir- itual inter- est ^b	belief in some- thing higher ^c	num- ber of char- acter ^d	views on the most essential			
					sacred	social	vital	quo- tidian
All	60	63	33	61	15	37	22	10
Man	54	56	31	56	12	33	22	10
Woman	66	69	35	66	18	40	22	9
18-34	60	70	37	61	14	34	21	10
35-54	58	58	31	62	12	42	25	12
55+	62	62	33	60	19	34	18	7
Low education	57	58	24	45	11	31	20	10
Middle group	61	63	29	54	15	35	21	11
Higher education	61	68	49	86	20	45	24	8

^a Believes in a personal God, life spirit or life force (see table 5.4).
^b Is very or somewhat interested in the sacred or supernatural (see table 5.4).
^c Subscribes explicitly to the view that something higher exists (see table 5.1).
^d Average number of characters (letters, punctuation and spaces) of the responses to the open question on something higher and on the most essential (including those who left no comment).

24 percent). Second, they bestow more significance to social values. While only 31 percent of the lower educated respondents describe the most essential in social terms, this share is 45 percent for those with a higher education. Third, there is a considerable difference in the average length of the text explaining their own views on something higher: those with a lower education wrote responses that were on average 45 characters long, while the higher educated respondents wrote almost twice as much (average of 86 characters). In comparison to those with a higher education, the lower educated respondents: a) more often do not know whether they believe in something higher (33 versus 21 percent), with the result that they were less often asked to provide a clarification; b) more often did not give an answer when they were asked to provide a clarification (in total 15 versus 10 percent); and c) more often sufficed with a shorter text (86 versus 124 characters on average).¹¹ With regard to the

¹¹ The average length mentioned here of 86 and 124 characters respectively deviates from the figures in table 5.6 (lower part, fourth column) because for the calculation in table 5.6 we included all respondents including those who left no further clarification, while the average length of 86 and 124 characters only covers respondents who left a comment.

last point, the fact that those with a lower education were less likely to believe in something higher played a role in the text being shorter on average. Their explanations of what the concept of something higher means to them were longer than their comments on what is truly important or what makes a person truly happy, while this difference was not evident among the higher educated.¹²

And finally, the average length of the explanations was partly dependent on the respondents' involvement in a church. The longest texts were written by frequent churchgoers (average of 89 characters), while those written by fringe church members (66 characters) and non-church members (50 characters) were shorter. We find once more that the Protestants are wordier (77 characters) than the Catholics (45 characters). With an average of 92 characters, theists wrote considerably more than atheists (52 characters). There was also a significant contrast between those respondents who were very interested in the spiritual (105 characters) and those who had no interest (42 characters). In other words, the longer texts were written by groups who professed faith in (some form) of something higher. It may be that people who believe in something higher want to bear witness to their faith and enjoy telling people about it.

7 Social involvement

One could argue that all of this is rather non-committal. What does it really mean that the Dutch emphasise social values or ideals? How do we prove that these are not merely words but have something to do with reality?

To address these questions, we included in our survey a number of items about volunteer work. This is a relevant test to determine whether the respondents put their ideals into practice. More specifically, we asked respondents about all forms of voluntary work for which they are not paid and that benefits either the greater good or people outside of one's family.¹³ 53 percent responded

12 The responses of higher educated respondents were on average somewhat longer (129 characters) if they explained what was truly important or what made them truly happy (121 if they explained their concept of something higher). Unfortunately, the number of respondents was too small for us to be able to further analyse the differences, but the fact that in explaining their concept of something higher, they could draw on available religious (in particular Biblical) language may play a role, while for the descriptions of the most essential one had to come up with one's own words, something that higher educated people most likely have more experience with and are more self-confident about doing. Frequent churchgoers wrote on average a longer comment (89 characters) than non-church members (50 characters).

13 In the Netherlands, the term 'volunteer work' is usually used for activities that occur within an organisational context. Survey questions therefore tend to refer to volunteer work that takes

positively to this question. Given that earlier surveys (dealing exclusively with organised volunteer work) indicate an average of 40 percent of the Dutch population being volunteers, the percentage in our survey does not appear to be exaggerated.¹⁴ The follow-up questions posed to the volunteers reveal that they are indeed engaged in various activities that take place outside of an organisational context (i.e., more informally). We have thus no reason to suppose that our research contains an excessive number of volunteers compared with other surveys. What is possible, however, is that surveys in general comprise a higher percentage of volunteers than the population as a whole. The very fact that participation in surveys is voluntary could imply that certain people will find it difficult to say no, some have a strong need to give their opinion and still others want to prove their great skills. All this can lead to volunteers being overrepresented in surveys. This is certainly the case if the survey makes use of people who are willing to be questioned multiple times, as is the case with our survey. This does not, however, affect the relevance of their responses. We primarily asked them about the number of hours they spend on average per week on their volunteer activities, the type of activity (or activities) and their motives for doing volunteer work. (For those involved in multiple types of volunteer work, we asked them about the activity on which they spend the most time.) To ascertain the motives of our respondents, we first posed an open question and then followed this up with a list of possible reasons for volunteering, for which the respondents were requested to indicate the importance they attach to each reason.

About a quarter of the respondents were unable to say how many hours per week they spend on average on volunteer work. This is probably because the pattern of their activities fluctuates significantly or because some activities are concentrated in certain periods (such as holidays). Of those who did specify a time, approximately half (49 percent) said they spent four hours per week, more than a quarter (26 percent) spent four to eight hours per week and a quarter (25 percent) spent more than eight hours per week on volunteer work. The overall average is 5.3 hours per week. A significant amount of organised volunteering involves sports clubs or takes place in a religious context. This is something that is consistent with the results of other surveys.¹⁵ To give an idea of the type of activities, table 5.7 shows a selection of 25 responses, listed in ascending order of age.

place 'in some kind of organised context', 'in or on behalf of an organisation' and the like.

¹⁴ See Dekker et al. 2007, p. 30-31.

¹⁵ See Dekker & De Hart 2010.

Table 5.7 Examples of volunteer work and the reasons for doing it*

who?	what?	why?
man, age 19 3 hours per week	Work at the cafeteria [of a football club], supervision of game week (local activities week for children), maintenance work at the football club.	Because I like to do it and also to contribute in some way to various initiatives.
woman, age 25 6 hours per week	I work as a volunteer for the Dutch Red Cross.	I like helping people.
woman, age 31 5 hours per week	I'm general coordinator of a kindergarten during school vacation week.	It's super fun!
man, age 36 2 hours per week	Give advice to a non-profit organisation, for which I make use of my own professional background.	Social obligation.
woman, age 37 4 hours per week	Support work at a primary school and support work for the elderly.	To stay in touch with school/society.
man, age 40 4 hours per week	Various management positions and some chores at the local elementary school (e.g. school gardening).	Because it's needed, it's an extension of my interests and because I have the skills for it.
woman, age 41 1 hour per week	I help out at a sports club and I help my grandmother with housework.	There doesn't have to be a reason for everything. Some things you just do.
man, age 44 5 hours per week	Trainer and team coach for youth football team.	I've always played football and now I coach my son's team.
man, age 46 6 hours per week	Diaconal work on the board of a church.	Everyone in the church has a task and this task was given to me by God.
woman, age 47 8 hours per week	Bereavement support group, assisting during funerals, organising commemorations, board member of a foundation.	There are many people who need help, and I like to do this.
woman, age 51 5 hours per week	Board member of a football club.	To allow members of the club to have fun in their sport and to try to teach values – also to the spectators.
man, age 52 10 hours per week	Help people with computer problems. Help the elderly.	The elderly need a lot of help. There is simply a shortage of staff in the social services sector.
woman, age 53 time unknown	I help an old lady shop for food and in good weather I go out with her; she is in a wheelchair.	I have time for this. She has one niece who looks after her, otherwise she has no one.

who?	what?	why?
woman, age 56 2 hours per week	I provide practical help to people who cannot do things by themselves, look into arrangements on behalf of the elderly, visit elderly people living alone.	To help somebody else with something for which that person lacks the possibility or capability. And to feel useful and perhaps also to hear that I am a good person.
man, age 57 3 hours per week	Help others (odd jobs).	I also receive help.
woman, age 59 10 hours per week	I work in a Christian bookstore.	I love to help people visiting our store find reading material and/or music that brings them closer to God and gives their life meaning.
man, age 61 30 hours per week	To let disadvantaged children from Berlin come to the Netherlands for three weeks of vacation with host families.	Because I'm concerned about the living conditions of children. I think it works very positively if children can experience that there are also good and caring people out there who love them.
woman, age 66 4 hours per week	I clean the church, babysit grandchildren, do other work for the church as it comes up or whatever is asked.	Because ordinary things also need to be done.
woman, age 67 5 hours per week	I look through the mail and all banking matters for someone who is blind.	It's good company and fun work.
man, age 68 4 hours per week	Help bring someone with mental disabilities to school. Contribute to cycling activities.	It benefits the health of the person being helped and therefore my own well-being.
woman, age 73 time unknown	I do whatever comes my way. Babysitting, helping a child make a doll. Bake something for someone. Repair work, listen, be there for others.	I do this because I feel I was meant to do it. I do whatever comes my way and see what I can do.
man, age 74 20 hours per week	Odd jobs in and around a house for the disabled. Taking people in wheelchairs on walks. Biking with people with mental disabilities.	Out of a sense of commitment with fellow human beings. It is very satisfying.
man, age 74 5 hours per week	I am a sexton in our church.	Because of my faith.
woman, age 83 time unknown	Sunflower. Visiting the sick. Giving a lift to my fellow human beings.	I'm still healthy and I know that the sick need attention.
woman, age 85 10 hours per week	Work for a philatelic association.	Because I have quite a lot of knowledge in this area, and that can benefit the association.

^a Responses to the follow-up questions to people who say they are volunteers: 'Could you briefly explain what you do? (if relevant, multiple activities)' and 'Could you briefly explain why you do it? (If you do more than one kind of volunteer work, please base your response on the volunteer work on which you spend the most amount of time.)'

Asked why they do volunteer work, very few reasons are given that relate to higher values. There are a few references to religious demands and expectations, but in general the responses are fairly basic: the work simply has to be done by someone, I can do it, it is very satisfying or I simply love doing it. The lack of more exalted motives might suggest a certain degree of bashfulness. It could be that the respondents used fairly basic and pragmatic expressions because they think higher motives will immediately sound so melodramatic. On the other hand, this can also point to a strong personal involvement: you do volunteer work because you yourself think it is important and because it gives you satisfaction, and not to fulfil a general ideal or the values of your faith.

8 Motives for helping

To determine the motivations of volunteers in a standardised manner, a variety of formats can be used.¹⁶ Reasons that are often mentioned include social motives, personal benefit, compassion and a sense of duty. In our survey, we presented seven possible reasons and asked the volunteers to indicate how important each one is for them personally: 1) for my own pleasure, i.e. because I find it fun or good company and I feel appreciated; 2) personal benefit, i.e. to learn something, to gain experience or to make contacts; 3) out of a sense of duty, i.e. because the work simply has to be done or because I think it is my moral duty; 4) religious conviction: to honour God or because I believe this is what my faith asks of me; 5) to help others, i.e. people who have less than I do or who are struggling with problems; 6) to contribute to a change in society or to political and idealistic goals; 7) with a view to maintaining or realising social provisions or activities that also benefit myself and those who are dear to me. Table 5.8 shows the results.

Around three-quarters of those we surveyed mentioned the following as important or very important motives: to help other people, to realise social provisions, for personal benefit, and for the pleasure of the work itself. Contributing to a good cause (considered important or very important by 37 percent) and religious considerations (mentioned by 22 percent) were not primary motives for very many respondents. In terms of correlations in the individual rankings of the various motives, the strongest correlation

¹⁶ See, for example, Musick & Wilson 2008 as well as Dekker & Halman 2003. In brief, research into motivations leads to the conclusion that the popularity depends heavily on the wording. One can distinguish between different dimensions, but they are rarely mutually exclusive.

Table 5.8 The importance respondents attach to possible motives for doing volunteer work (in percent)^a

	very important	important	not important	very unimportant	don't know
1. For my own pleasure	24	58	16	1	1
2. Personal benefit	10	62	22	3	3
3. Out of a sense of duty	8	48	30	11	4
4. Religious conviction	8	14	32	42	4
5. To help others	23	58	11	3	6
6. To make a contribution	6	31	40	15	8
7. Social provisions	16	64	12	2	4

^a Volunteers responded to the following question: 'Below are seven possible motives for doing volunteer work. For each motive, please indicate how important or unimportant it is for you personally in your decision to do volunteer work. (If you are involved in more than one kind of volunteer work, please base your response on the volunteer work on which you spend the most amount of time.) You may have already addressed some of these motives in the response you just gave. Could you nonetheless indicate how important each motive is for you?'

was between personal benefit and own pleasure ($r = 0.41$). There are also significantly positive correlations between religious belief and a sense of duty ($r = 0.30$), between religious belief and helping other people ($r = 0.26$), and between religious belief and contributing to political or idealistic goals ($r = 0.25$). It is noteworthy that there were no significant negative correlations between the motives mentioned. The strongest negative correlation occurs where we would expect it to occur, namely between a sense of duty and one's own pleasure ($r = -0.08$), but this is not statistically significant. Incidentally, respondents often combined multiple reasons. 'Fun' and 'necessary'; doing something for another and becoming a better person as a result; 'caring for others and helping ourselves'¹⁷ – all of these motives are certainly not mutually exclusive.

9 Characteristics of the volunteers

Finally, we consider the backgrounds of the volunteers, the amount of time they spend on volunteering and their motivations. We took the first six motives from table 5.8 (excluding the seventh motive) and sorted them into pairs, so that we now have three kinds of motives: a) personal motives (i.e.:

17 Wuthnow 1991.

own enjoyment or personal benefit); b) motives related to duty (i.e.: a sense of duty or religious grounds); and c) social motives (i.e.: help other people or realise a political goal). The first column in table 5.9 shows the percentage of the entire population involved in volunteer work. The columns to the right of this apply only to those working as volunteers.

The statistics on participation do not spring any surprises. We see that the elderly and the frequent churchgoers participate more often. But there is also an anomaly: contrary to what is commonly seen, the higher educated in our survey were not more active than the lower educated. This could be because our survey counts as volunteers a larger number of providers of informal help. We are, however, less interested in the socio-demographic pattern than in the relationship with higher values. It seems that volunteering is more popular with people who believe in something higher and with people who describe the most essential in life as either sacred or commonplace. Volunteering is less popular among those for whom the most essential in life represents vital values. If we limit ourselves to the belief in something higher, a statistical analysis shows that this belief has a significant correlation with volunteering. If, however, other features from table 5.9 are included in the analysis, then the effect of this belief in something higher disappears. It turns out that it is the group of frequent churchgoers who are more likely to perform volunteer work, as is in line with previous research.¹⁸ If we look at the other features of volunteers, we see that the elderly, those with a lower education and men, on the one hand, spend more time volunteering compared with young people, those with a higher education and women on the other. Belief in the existence of something higher and religious characteristics are irrelevant here, but they are relevant when it comes to the motivations for doing volunteer work. A sense of duty plays a role primarily with those who believe in something higher, with those who have a religious conception of the most important things in life and with frequent churchgoers. It is more often the elderly than the young who are guided by a sense of duty. For younger volunteers, reasons such as personal benefit and pleasure play a greater role.

18 See, among others, Ruiter & De Graaf 2006, p. 191-201; Dekker & De Hart 2006, p. 317-338.

Table 5.9 Background and features of volunteering (in percent and hours per week)

	active as volunteer	investment of time + motives of volunteers ^a			
		time	personal	duty	social
All	53	5.3	89	62	84
Believes in something higher	60	5.6	89	74	82
The most essential is religious	70	-	87	88	88
The most essential is social	55	5.5	89	58	86
The most essential is vital	48	-	89	51	86
The most essential is quotidian	64	-	-	-	-
Theist or something-ist	58	5.1	89	68	86
Has interest in the spiritual	56	5.2	88	66	86
Frequent churchgoer	74	5.2	88	84	85
Fringe church member	54	5.2	89	71	84
Non-church member	43	5.4	90	48	83
Man	51	5.8	86	69	79
Woman	55	4.8	92	56	89
18-34	43	3.3	98	50	89
35-54	51	4.8	88	59	84
55+	63	6.8	86	72	82
Lower educated	56	6.0	89	64	84
Middle group	49	5.1	89	63	86
Higher educated	54	4.9	88	59	83
N =	(775)	(310)	(408)	(408)	(408)

^aThese figures relate to the 53 percent of volunteers. The column entitled ‘time’ shows the average number of hours per week spent on volunteering; the columns ‘personal’, ‘duty’ and ‘social’ show the respective percentages of those who considered motives 1 and 2, motives 3 and 4, and motives 5 and 6 in table 5.8 very important. The cell was left blank (-) if we received information from fewer than 75 respondents.

10 Conclusions

In this chapter, we explored what Dutch people consider to be 'higher values' on the basis of a survey we conducted among 775 respondents above the age of 18. Approximately one-third of the respondents indicated that they believed that there was something higher. A large majority was able to indicate what they consider truly important in life or what makes a person truly happy, for which they had a variety of values in mind. The values that came up the most were in the social field (44 percent) and had to do with being of service to others, contributing to society, caring for one's loved ones, and forming a community. One-quarter (26 percent) of the respondents mentioned values that we categorise as vital, which have to do with such things as self-development, living a healthy lifestyle and having fun. Values of a religious nature came in third place (18 percent), where the focus was on God, faith, spiritual energy or experiencing oneness. And finally, 12 percent of the respondents mentioned quotidian values such as having sufficient work or a sufficient income, and the absence of worries.

All this leads us to two conclusions. First, we see that the meaning of life for a majority of Dutch people (88 percent) lies in 'higher values'. This contradicts the common notion that present-day citizens primarily pursue their own interests. Second, we see that there is a significant degree of variation in terms of the content of these values, even though most of the respondents come out in favour of social values. Both conclusions underscore the fact that in our modern society, moral sensitivity has not disappeared but rather changed in nature.

In addition, we have seen that there is broad interest in the Netherlands for spirituality. Interest in the church is modest, as evidenced by the fact that 17 percent of the population define themselves as fringe church members and 63 percent as non-church members. This does not alter the fact that 60 percent of the respondents believe in a personal God or some kind of life spirit. Those who actively deny the existence of a God or a life spirit make up only a small minority of the population (12 percent). Even among the fringe church members and non-church members, belief in a life spirit is quite prevalent (40 percent). This interest in the spiritual determines how respondents filled out the section on 'higher values'. Religious values are particularly popular among the theists, i.e. those who adhere to the belief in a personal God. The reverse is true for agnostics and atheists: they are more likely to adhere to social and vital values. A similar effect can be seen in the extent to which people are interested in spirituality. Those with a significant interest in the spiritual are more likely than others to

see the most essential in life in religious terms; they are also the ones who say relatively often that something higher exists. The opposite is true for those who reject the idea of something higher: they consider social and vital values to be essential. These findings again point to a twofold conclusion. On the one hand, they illustrate that the recognition of something higher (and especially the religious variant) remains linked to spiritual interest and religious beliefs. But they also demonstrate that many respondents who reject religious faith or an interest in the spiritual have their own interpretation of 'higher values'.

Apart from this philosophical or religious dimension, notions about 'higher values' are also determined by the level of education. Those who have completed higher education more often believe in something higher than the lower educated. Moreover, they attach great importance to social values. They are also able to provide a good written explanation to support their view. And finally, their comments tended to be on the long side. While the written responses of the lower educated respondents were on average 45 characters, the average text of higher educated respondents was nearly double that (86 characters). Thus we see the phenomenon of modern citizens possessing a significant degree of assertiveness based on his/her education also manifesting itself in the area of spiritual values. The more well-educated a respondent, the more likely s/he is to believe in something higher, to show an interest in the spiritual, to embrace religious, social or vital values, and to write a longer text explaining these preferences. At the same time, the level of education is not the only factor behind the lengthy texts, as the explanation provided by those who believe in something higher were on average longer than those who left a comment on that which makes a person truly happy or that which is truly important in life. One's relationship with the church also plays a role, as the text provided by fringe church members and non-church members were on average significantly shorter than those who described themselves as frequent churchgoers. Respondents with a theistic and spiritual orientation wrote longer comments than the atheists and those who had no interest in spirituality. And finally, the Catholics were less wordy in their responses than the Protestants.

Although it is tempting to believe that these are merely words and that the values expressed in the survey have little to do with reality, this is refuted by our research. We have illustrated this with a number of items on volunteering. A significant number of our respondents not only talk about spiritual values, they also bring them into practice. They commit themselves to certain ideals in many fields, although they often have difficulty when such terms are used. Dutch volunteers would be reluctant to associate their

motivation for volunteering with 'something higher'. They prefer to say, for example, 'The work simply needs to be done' or 'I also get a lot out of it'. The most cited reasons were: to help other people and to enjoy themselves. Motives that were mentioned less often were religious beliefs and a sense of duty. Typical of the attitude of these modern citizens is that helping their fellow human beings and helping themselves are not mutually exclusive. There tends to be a certain mix of motives in which looking after your own interests and supporting your fellow human being go hand in hand. What is striking is that volunteering is primarily popular among respondents who adhere to a belief in something higher and among those who give a religious or quotidian interpretation to the question of what is most essential in life. Respondents who consider vital values to be the most essential are less likely to be active as volunteers. Another point is that a sense of duty is primarily a motive given by the older generation, while the younger ones are more motivated by pleasure and personal benefit.

All in all, we see a very diverse spectrum, with higher values not only being embraced by a large portion of the Dutch population but also being interpreted in many different ways. Multiple factors contribute to the way in which they are interpreted, such as religious or spiritual ideas but also the level of education and other social characteristics of the respondents. What we can refute in any case is the idea that moral sensitivity is absent in modern society. How moral values in the Netherlands have changed as a result of the process of modernisation is the topic of our next chapter.

6 Changes in norms and values

Erik van Ingen, Loek Halman & Paul Dekker

In this chapter we argue that moral values in modern Dutch society have not disappeared but rather changed. This change is clearly visible if we compare today's society with that of a few decades ago. We already focused on the negative aspects of this change in previous chapters.¹ Here we would like to emphasise the positive developments that have taken place, for example the greater equality between men and women, and the increased focus on individual responsibility and self-development. From this we can infer that what has changed over the years is primarily the *content* of our moral sentiments. Such a change in the content of morality does not occur out of the blue, of course; our contention is that it ensued from the gradual modernisation of society. This is in any case the hypothesis that we will be testing in this chapter on the basis of empirical survey data.

We are certainly not the first to study the relationship between changes in values and modernisation. A well-known and widely used theory on (post-)modernisation is that of Ronald Inglehart. Below, we present the main ideas of this theory. We then analyse whether the theory applies to the Netherlands and if so, to what extent. Most of the empirical data we use here is derived from the *European Values Study* (EVS), a large-scale research project that has been conducted every nine years from 1981, offering insights into key developments over the last thirty years. Because the EVS is conducted in all countries within Europe, we can compare the data for the Netherlands with the rest of Europe. This is relevant because national contexts play a crucial role, particularly with regard to values. The survey includes many questions that reveal how respondents perceive matters such as religion, work, politics, leisure, health and family life. It thus constitutes a unique source for our research.

We begin with a brief outline of Inglehart's view of the process of modernisation (section 1). We also assess the position of the Netherlands vis-a-vis other European countries (section 2). Then we look at how the values of individual Dutch citizens have changed in recent decades (section 3) and which values experienced the most significant change (section 4). Elaborating on this, we first consider several aspects of private life (section 5) and then say something about citizenship (section 6). This brings us face to face

¹ See chapter 4.

with a trend that was discussed in chapter 4, namely the declining tolerance for deviant behaviour (section 7), which reflects the fact that public morals are slowly but surely becoming stricter (section 8). Finally, we reveal how the significance of work has changed (section 9), and then we wrap up the chapter with our most important conclusions (section 10).

1 Two dimensions of modernisation

The modernisation theory formulated by Ronald Inglehart and others is based on a distinction between modernisation and post-modernisation. These terms refer to two successive stages of societal change. While modernisation concerns the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, post-modernisation refers to the transition to a post-industrial society. Both processes have had far-reaching consequences for moral values. The transition from an agrarian to an industrial society led to greater prosperity and greater social differentiation. It also resulted in religious traditions gradually losing their clout. Due to the eradication of significant risks to livelihoods and the increasingly higher level of education acquired by the population, more emphasis was placed on a rational legitimisation of authority. Legitimate authority was increasingly granted to the state and less to the church or to one's faith. This is why developments such as industrialisation and urbanisation trigger a process of secularisation. If religious faith does not disappear, it will at the very least dwindle to the level of a private matter. This trend towards secularisation occurs primarily in the first phase of modernisation.

But history does not stand still. After societies take the first steps on the path towards modernisation, they reach the next stage. Inglehart defines this phase as post-modernisation. Once again, this stage brings profound changes, one of which is that people place more and more value on their individual freedom. From the moment that a certain level of certainty and prosperity is achieved, matters such as self-determination, personal autonomy and self-development become more important. People no longer have to struggle for survival and can therefore focus more on the quality of their lives. This also has consequences for authority: not only do citizens become dismissive of traditional or religious forms of authority, they also reject more rational and secular forms of authority such as the authority of governments, employers, teachers, executives, etc. In effect, this second dimension points out the discrepancy between submission or obedience and individual freedom or self-determination. On this point, Inglehart

and Baker note the following: 'While industrialisation was linked with an emphasis on economic growth at almost any price, the publics of affluent societies placed increasing emphasis on quality-of-life, environmental protection, and self-expression.'²

All in all, this theory states that societies develop along two dimensions, each resulting from a specific phase in the modernisation process. The first dimension boils down to a transition from religious to secular values, the second to a transition from values dominated by survival to values that prioritise self-expression. An important question, of course, is how one can measure these two dimensions. On the first dimension, Inglehart and Baker note: 'This dimension reflects the contrast between societies in which religion is very important and those in which it is not. Within this dimension deference to God, Fatherland and Family are closely linked.'³ The authors inferred this from the responses to their survey, in which people were asked to what extent they subscribed to the following views: 1) God is very important in my life; 2) it is more important for a child to learn obedience and religious faith than independence and determination;⁴ 3) abortion is never justifiable; 4) respondent has a strong sense of national pride; and 5) respondent favours more respect for authority. What we see here is that a number of religious and non-religious values are combined. The second dimension that Inglehart and Baker distinguished emphasises the following: 1) respondent gives priority to economic and physical security over self-expression and quality of life; 2) respondent describes himself as not very happy; 3) respondent has not signed and would not sign a petition; 4) homosexuality is never justifiable;⁵ 5) you have to be very careful about trusting people.

The idea behind both dimensions is based on Maslow's well-known hierarchy of needs.⁶ According to Maslow, human behaviour is determined by the following needs: physiological needs, the need for safety, the need for love and belongingness, the need for esteem and the need for self-actualisation. There is a certain sequence and hierarchy here: higher

2 Inglehart & Baker 2000, p. 21.

3 Inglehart & Baker 2000, p. 25.

4 Index of four items that measure values related to raising children (conservative versus modern).

5 The way in which we have operationalised the survival – self-expression dimension is not identical to that of Inglehart. We have left homosexuality out, because our factor and reliability analysis shows that it did not fit in the scale for the Netherlands. In general, the factor solution that Inglehart uses is very sensitive to differences in place and time.

6 Maslow 1943.

needs only become prominent once the lower ones are met. Although this theory was initially formulated for an individual's development, it can also be applied with some success to the development of countries.⁷ This means that countries must first fulfil fundamental needs such as adequate food and security before values such as self-actualisation come within reach, which is now the case for most developed countries. It is no coincidence, then, that there is a strong correlation between a country's score on self-expression and its level of prosperity.⁸

2 The Netherlands and Europe

To give an impression of the changes in values in Europe, we analysed the scores of a number of countries on the two above-mentioned dimensions of modernisation.⁹ The result can be found in figure 6.1, where the x-axis refers to the scale of religious to secular and the y-axis to the scale of survival to self-actualisation. The values on both axes are (standardized) factor scores, where 0 represents the average score across all countries, and the units are standard deviations from this average score (e.g., the score of Sweden on the religious-secular dimension is around one standard deviation above the average). The upper-right quadrant is populated by countries that are modern in terms of both dimensions. Countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and Denmark belong to this group. In the lower-left quadrant are countries that take a traditional position on both dimensions, such as Turkey, Poland and Romania. In the lower-right quadrant, we find countries that score high when it comes to secular values but low on freedom or self-expression. It is clear that in Eastern Europe, society still revolves heavily around survival and that many citizens do not come around to self-actualisation. On the axis of religious versus secular, the distribution of European countries does not appear to follow any clear geographical pattern.

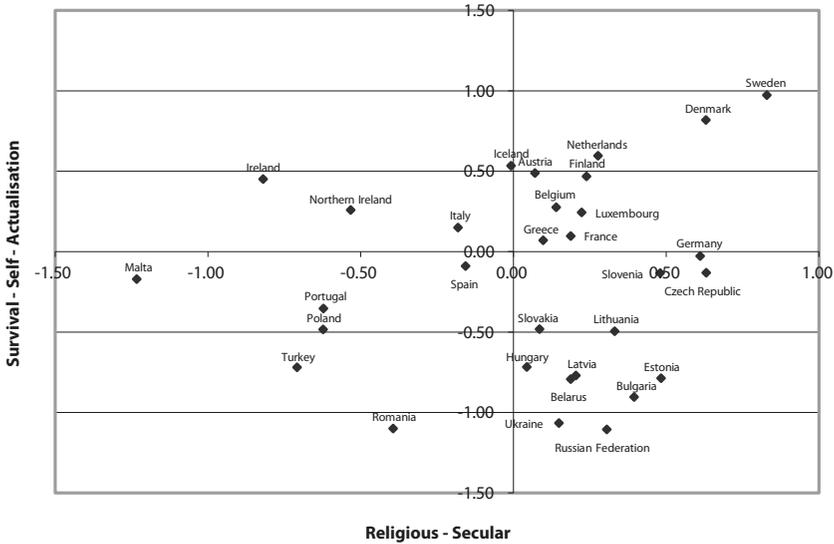
What explains a country's position on the two dimensions? Although Inglehart claims to be no adherent of economic determinism, he has long held that economic processes are the motor behind modernisation. Writing in 2000, he argues: '... economic development tends to propel

7 Hagerty 1999.

8 The EVS data reveal a very strong link with GNP at the country level ($r = 0.86$).

9 We used the same procedure as Inglehart & Baker (2000) to construct the two scales, i.e. a principal component analysis with two factors based on the indicators mentioned in section 6.1.

Figure 6.1 Position of European countries on the religious versus secular dimension (x-axis) and the dimension of survival versus self-actualisation (y-axis) in 1999



Source: EVS 1999

societies in a roughly predictable direction: Industrialization leads to occupational specialization, rising educational levels, rising income levels, and eventually brings unforeseen changes – changes in gender roles, attitudes towards authority and sexual norms; declining fertility rates; broader political participation; and less easily led publics.¹⁰ However, there are also other social processes – whether in conjunction with economic development or not – that lead to a change in values. One can think of improvements in the general state of health, higher life expectancy, greater participation in education, etc. In the case of such factors, what is primarily at stake are livelihoods. This prompted Inglehart and Norris to suppose that people tend to seek support and meaning in a religion if their survival is uncertain.¹¹ As a result, the paradoxical situation can arise in which the most prosperous countries are subject to a process of secularisation whereas the influence of religion is growing on a worldwide

10 Inglehart & Baker 2000, p. 21.

11 Norris & Inglehart 2004, p. 4.

scale.¹² It is mainly those countries afflicted with war, hunger, poverty and other risks to livelihoods where traditional-religious values turn out to be relatively strong.

To test this explanation of secularisation, we looked at how the two dimensions relate to four indicators of livelihood: 1) the level of prosperity in the form of gross national product; 2) the degree of socio-economic inequality in the form of the Gini coefficient; 3) the percentage of the population that has paid work; and 4) the average level of education of the population. We conducted a regression analysis¹³ in which the dependent variables were the factor scores indicating the (relative) position of countries on both dimensions of value change and the explanatory variables were the livelihood indicators (see table 6.1).

One remarkable result is that the Gini coefficient has a negative effect on secularisation: when the differences in income in a country increase, the population's preference for secular values declines. By contrast, the level of education has a positive effect on secularisation: the higher the average level of education of a population, the more accepted secular ideas are. Together, these two factors explain 87 percent of the variation between countries with regard to secularisation. For the second dimension, it is precisely the other aspects that play a role. The more affluent the country, the more emphasis the population places on values of self-expression. This aspect has a particularly strong factor (the standardised regression coefficient beta is 0.88), which moreover corresponds with the results of comparative research conducted by others.¹⁴ It was also found to be the case that the larger the share of the population with paid work, the greater the emphasis

12 As is well known, the United States is a notable exception on this point. It is on the one hand a relatively wealthy country, and on the other hand one that has undergone very little secularisation. Norris and Inglehart explain this anomaly by pointing out that, unlike many other developed countries, the United States has no substantial welfare state. As a result, large segments of the population still struggle with significant risks to their livelihood, which in turn leads to a relatively strong interest in religion (Norris & Inglehart 2004, p. 84, 90-94, 108, 211, 228-229).

13 In a regression analysis, we look at the linear relation between one dependent variable (indicated by the letter Y) and one or more independent variables (denoted by the letter X). The regression coefficient indicates how strong the relation is. For example, if there is a link between people's height and their weight such that someone who is one centimetre taller would weigh on average one kilogram more, then the regression coefficient (denoted by the letter b) is equal to 1.

14 Hagerty 1999.

Table 6.1 Regression analysis of the two dimensions based on four indicators of livelihood in 1999 (unstandardised OLS regression coefficients)

	Religious vs. secular	Survival vs. self-expression
Gross national product	0.002	0.055**
Gini coefficient	-0.042*	-0.010
Percentage employed	0.384	1.549*
Average level of education	0.098*	0.006
Intercept	-1.021	-3.037**
Adjusted R ²	0.869	0.895
Number of countries	24	24

*p < 0.05 and **p < 0.01

Source: EVS 1999

on self-expression. Together, these two factors account for a (very large) variance of 90 percent. These results thus back up Inglehart's theory.¹⁵

Many developments that contribute to modernisation – such as the increase in productivity, the improvement in living conditions, and technological innovation – can be observed at the level of the society as a whole. But how do they relate to changes at the individual level?

3 Changes in values at the individual level

Inglehart's theory is based on the fact that generations grow up under varying circumstances.¹⁶ There is a substantial difference between the generation of people who experienced the Second World War, the generation whose formative years were in the post war years of reconstruction and the generation that grew up with the certainties of the welfare state. As a result of these experiences, members of the different generations show signs of a specific value orientation later in life. Once again, livelihood plays a role here. Birth cohorts who spent their formative years in a period of uncertainty have a more materialistic value system, while cohorts who have experienced a high degree of certainty during their youth tend to embrace post-materialistic values.¹⁷ We also know that the values of a generation can

15 See also the analysis of identity in modern society by Giddens 1991.

16 Inglehart & Flanagan 1987, p. 1296.

17 Inglehart 1997. Incidentally, research has also shown that the variation in value orientation is determined by other factors. Thus the process of intergenerational transmission leads to

change after their formative years have long passed. This is even possible at an advanced age.¹⁸ Below, we discuss what kinds of cohort differences have played a role in the Netherlands. We then focus on the two dimensions of modernisation put forth by Inglehart. More specifically, we ask the following question: what do the differences in values at the individual level look like in terms of the dimension of religious - secular values and the dimension of survival - self-expression? We also look at whether we can observe any changes in these dimensions between 1981 and 2008.

At first glance, the data in table 6.2 appear to contradict Inglehart's theory. We must remember, however, that the EVS only has data from the period after 1981, while the most significant changes took place much earlier. This is true for the process of industrialisation and the value dimension associated with it. Industrial employment continued to grow in the Netherlands until the end of the 1960s, after which it declined. The process of secularisation accelerated in this period, which is consistent with Inglehart's theory. An even sharper decline in religious values did not take place after 1981, if only because the engine behind this decline (industrialisation) was less powerful. It is therefore not surprising to see that there is barely a change in the first dimension in the period 1980-2008. This reasoning, however, does not hold up as well for the second dimension. The trend of increasing socio-economic security emerged only after the end of the Second World War and continued until the end of the 1980s. The effects of this in the form of a greater emphasis on values related to self-expression should be noticeable until at least the 1990s.

Table 6.2 Development of Inglehart's value dimensions (factor scores) in the Netherlands 1981-2008

	Religious vs. secular	Survival vs. self-expression
1981	-0.09	-0.36
1990	0.14	0.06
1999	0.12	0.13
2008	-0.11	0.09

Source: EVS NL 1981-2008

values being present even before the so-called formative period, i.e., between 15 and 25 years of age (Kroh 2009).

¹⁸ Danigelis, Hardy & Cutler 2007.

Table 6.3 Regression analysis of value dimensions based on birth cohorts and age

	Religious vs. secular		Survival vs. self-expression	
	Model I-A	Model I-B	Model II-A	Model II-B
Cohort prior to 1920	-0.804**	-0.539**	-0.821**	-0.844**
Cohort 1921-1930	-0.541**	-0.334**	-0.528**	-0.558**
Cohort 1931-1940	-0.385**	-0.284**	-0.454**	-0.494**
Cohort 1941-1950	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cohort 1951-1960	0.196**	0.107*	0.113*	0.180**
Cohort 1961-1970	0.153**	0.033	0.098*	0.244**
Cohort from 1971	0.055	-0.065	0.026	0.250**
Controlled for age	no	yes	no	yes
Intercept	0.079*	0.215	0.112	-0.372**

* $p < 0.05$ and ** $p < 0.01$

Source: EVS-NL 1981-2008

To verify that the main changes in value orientation did indeed occur before the baseline year of the EVS, we mapped out the differences between birth cohorts. Table 6.3 shows the differences between successive generations in terms of the two dimensions. We carried out the analysis for each dimension twice: once without controlling for age differences (A), and once controlling for age differences (B).¹⁹ The latter is important because we primarily want to establish persistent differences between the cohorts. Given that age differences can distort the picture, it must be controlled for accordingly. From model I-B in Table 6.3 we can deduce that there is indeed a development in religious to secular values. In a general sense, therefore, Inglehart's theory appears to apply: the older the cohort, the stronger the preference for traditional values. Remarkably, however, this change persists until 1950, but with later cohorts it is as good as invisible. This means that the transition from religious to secular values as a result of cohort replacement has less and less impact. Based on the figures in Table 6.3, one can even argue that this development makes little difference for those born later than 1950. Model II-B shows that the differences between cohorts in the second value dimension are both larger and run for a longer period of time. The younger the cohorts, the more emphasis they placed on values associated

19 We controlled for age by adding a dummy variable to the model for all the different age categories (with the exception of one).

with self-expression. Although the differences in cohorts are the largest before 1950, there are also significant differences in later cohorts.

This leads us to a twofold conclusion. First, the transition from religious to secular values took place largely among the generations born in the first half of the twentieth century. This is consistent with Inglehart's claim that industrialisation leads to secularism at the level of values. In the post-war generations, this change weakened considerably. Our second conclusion is that the transition from survival to self-expression is something that took place throughout the entire population, regardless of the generation. This is consistent with the fact that over the entire period, livelihoods in the Netherlands gradually improved. We have thus established that major changes in values in the Netherlands occurred already before 1981.

4 Hierarchy of values

There is also another way for us to examine this earlier period. We consulted one of the first studies into values in the Netherlands, a survey carried out in 1969, in which respondents were asked to rank two sets of 18 values.²⁰ A distinction was made – following Rokeach – between ‘final values’ and ‘instrumental values’, with the first category referring to the ultimate end goals that people want to achieve and the second category referring to the way in which the end goals are achieved.²¹ Researchers at the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, or SCP) asked similar questions in a survey it conducted in 2005, which allows us to compare this with the 1969 survey and see to what extent the pattern in values changed over that period. The results of these comparisons are shown in tables 6.4 and 6.5. The items in these tables are arranged according to the extent to which they rose in the ranking (see column ‘difference’, where the more negative the score, the more important the value has become). For clarity's sake, we have split up the values into three groups. The first group includes values that became more important between 1969 and 2005, the middle group consists of values whose importance remained more or less constant (the difference did not significantly deviate from zero), and the lower group includes values whose importance diminished.²²

²⁰ Brandsma 1977.

²¹ Rokeach & Ball-Rokeach 1989.

²² The average scores are calculated on a 9-point scale instead of the more intuitive 18-point scale (for 18 items). This intermediate step was necessary in order to make the 2005 and 1969 data

Table 6.4 Final Rokeach values by ranking (1-18) and average score (1-9) in 1969 and 2005, arranged by increasing importance (difference column)

	ranking (1-18)		avg. score (1-9)		differ- ence	T-test
	1969	2005	1969	2005		
Pleasure (a pleasant, joyful life)	12	6	5.6	4.2	-1.4	0.000
Self-esteem (self-respect)	14	8	5.6	4.5	-1.2	0.000
Freedom (independence, free choice)	5	4	4.5	3.8	-0.7	0.000
True friendship (close camaraderie)	4	3	4.5	3.8	-0.7	0.000
Equality (brotherhood, equal opportunities)	10	7	4.9	4.4	-0.5	0.000
Happiness (contentment)	3	1	3.4	2.9	-0.5	0.000
Exciting life (stimulating, active life)	18	16	6.7	6.4	-0.4	0.000
Social recognition (respect, admiration)	16	11	5.8	5.5	-0.3	0.000
Inner peace (no inner conflicts)	7	9	4.9	4.8	-0.1	0.854
Wisdom (a well-informed understanding of life)	11	10	5.4	5.4	0.0	0.935
Fulfilled love (sexual and spiritual intimacy)	13	12	5.6	5.7	0.1	0.151
World full of beauty (in nature and in art)	15	13	5.7	5.9	0.2	0.080
Redemption (salvation, eternal life)	17	18	6.7	6.8	0.2	0.028
Security for one's family (care for loved ones)	2	2	3.2	3.6	0.4	0.000
World peace (no wars or conflicts)	1	5	3.0	4.0	0.9	0.000
A comfortable life (a life of prosperity)	8	14	4.9	6.0	1.0	0.000
National security (no riots or rebellions)	9	15	4.9	6.0	1.0	0.000
Sense of personal achievement (contribute to society)	6	17	4.6	6.5	2.0	0.000

Source: Het waardenpatroon van de Nederlandse bevolking (1969) and Tijdsbestedingsonderzoek (2005)

Which values increased the most in importance? Table 6.4 shows that the largest increases occurred in pleasure and self-esteem. Pleasure rose in the ranking from 12th to 6th place, while self-esteem jumped from 14th to 8th place. The rise of self-esteem makes sense from Inglehart's theory: because traditional values diminish in importance and more room emerges

comparable. We also indicate the difference between the scores in 2005 and in 1969 (penultimate column). The more negative the difference, the more that item is pushed up in the rankings – i.e., the more important it becomes.

Table 6.5 Instrumental Rokeach values by ranking (1-18) and average score (1-9) in 1969 and 2005, arranged by increasing importance (difference column)

	ranking (1-18)		avg. score (1-9)		differ- ence	T-test
	1969	2005	1969	2005		
Cheerful (light-hearted, sunny)	13	3	5.5	4.0	-1.5	0.000
Imagination (creative, imaginative)	18	12	7.0	5.6	-1.4	0.000
Independent (self-confidence, self-satisfaction)	12	7	5.4	4.7	-0.7	0.000
Responsible (reliable)	2	2	3.7	3.1	-0.6	0.000
Honest (sincere, truthful)	1	1	2.8	2.5	-0.3	0.000
Courageous (standing up for your own beliefs)	10	10	5.2	5.0	-0.2	0.018
Broad-minded (open mind, space for others)	9	6	4.9	4.7	-0.2	0.027
Loving (warm, tender)	4	5	4.4	4.3	-0.1	0.231
Self-control (self-discipline, self-restraint)	11	11	5.4	5.3	-0.1	0.810
Helpful (work for the well-being of others)	3	4	4.0	4.0	0.0	0.801
Polite (courteous, well-mannered)	6	8	4.7	4.9	0.2	0.044
Forgiving (willing to forgive others)	7	9	4.8	5.0	0.2	0.003
Logical (consistent, rational)	17	18	6.1	6.4	0.3	0.001
Clean (neat, tidy)	14	14	5.5	6.0	0.5	0.000
Obedient (dutiful, obliging)	15	15	5.7	6.2	0.5	0.000
Intellectual (intelligent, pensive)	16	17	5.7	6.2	0.6	0.000
Ambitious (works hard to achieve something)	8	16	4.8	6.2	1.4	0.000
Competent (able to do one's work well)	5	13	4.4	5.9	1.5	0.000

Source: Het waardenpatroon van de Nederlandse bevolking (1969) and Tijdsbestedingsonderzoek (2005)

for individual preferences, personal autonomy becomes more important. This is consistent with the growing significance of instrumental values such as imagination and independence. The rise in importance of pleasure (table 6.4) and cheerfulness (table 6.5) is less easy to interpret. It corresponds with semi-scientific publications that state that 'fun' in the Netherlands is becoming a guiding principle in leisure activities.²³ This would suggest

23 Metz 2002; see also chapter 4, section 3.

that there is an increase in hedonism in Dutch society. Fun can, of course, also arise from more elevated forms of leisure activities, but this is not indicated given the fact that the instrumental value of cheerfulness has also increased.

If we look at the values whose importance declined, we do in fact see a decline in traditional values. This is evident from the fact that final values such as comfort, peace, security and bliss were less prominent in 2005 than 35 years earlier (table 6.4). Inglehart's theory considers these values to be traditional ones. We must, however, add a caveat to all of this. Although this is primarily about the extent to which values *change*, the absolute scores are also of importance. We see, for example, that respondents always assign a high priority to 'security for the family' (in both 1969 and 2005, this value ranks second place!), while the change over the years was very modest. What is also interesting is the ranking of an instrumental value such as 'honesty', to which the Dutch have ascribed increasing significance over the years but which occupied first place in both 1969 and 2005. Such outcomes cannot be fully explained by Inglehart's theory. We suspect that his theory says less about the *hierarchy* of values in a given (national) situation than about the direction in which these values *change*.

Incidentally, there are other factors that affect the value system at the individual level. Table 6.6 summarises some known background characteristics. To begin with, men attached more importance to rational-secular and self-expressive values than women. But the differences between men and women were not substantial. Those with a low level of education tend to be on the traditional side, both in terms of religious values and values of survival. The opposite applies to those with a higher education: they express a preference for secular values and consider self-expression to be vitally important. The more left-wing-oriented respondents were in the political sense, the more their values inclined towards the rational-secular side. Right-wing-oriented respondents appeared to be more traditional: they preferred traditional-religious ideas and values of survival. This corroborates results of other studies showing that political preference corresponds to post-materialism in the Netherlands.²⁴ However, the causal mechanism remains unclear. It may be that people embrace a particular value system on the basis of their political preferences, but it is equally possible that they adopt their political preference on the basis of an already existing value orientation. Finally, the preference for traditional values is the greatest among respondents with a low income and among those who work at the

24 Dekker, Ester & Van den Broek 1999.

Table 6.6 Value dimensions per social characteristics of individuals (factor scores)

	Religious vs. secular	Survival vs. self-expression
Gender		
– man	0.11	0.10
– woman	-0.11	-0.10
Schooling ended at age:		
– 12 to 15 years	-0.54	-0.67
– 16 to 17 years	-0.10	-0.14
– 18 to 21 years	0.11	0.11
– 22 years or more	0.41	0.54
Political views		
– far left	0.64	0.45
– moderately left	0.15	0.10
– moderately right	-0.17	-0.07
– far right	-0.58	-0.31
Income		
– first quartile	-0.13	-0.18
– second quartile	-0.12	-0.10
– third quartile	0.07	0.07
– fourth quartile	0.27	0.33
Occupational groups		
– managers & professionals	0.01	0.04
– non-manual labourers	0.16	0.14
– manual labourers	-0.13	-0.38
– other	-0.07	-0.12

Source: EVS 1981-2008

lowest level of the functional hierarchy (manual labourers). Those with the highest incomes score the highest in terms of secular values and self-expression. Within occupational groups, we see a distinction primarily between manual labour and white-collar work.

5 Values in private life

When it comes to the development of moral sentiments, values pertaining to private life play an important role. This is a prime example of an area in which the Netherlands has undergone far-reaching changes in recent

decades. Broadly speaking, Dutch society has become much more permissive. Issues such as homosexuality, abortion or euthanasia are now accepted by large portions of the population, even if these issues are considered sins according to traditional Christian doctrine.²⁵ Table 6.7 shows how this acceptance developed per subject. Respondents were asked to give a score between 1 (= never acceptable) and 10 (= always acceptable). From their responses, we determined an average score for each survey year as well as an average for the thirty years previous to 2008. The table shows that acceptance of most of the behaviours has indeed increased sharply. The strongest increase was in the first four items. Here we can see that the influence of traditional Christian thinking has declined considerably. Most Dutch citizens do not have a problem with a person's decision to have an abortion, to request euthanasia or to file for divorce, and they are also tolerant when it comes to sexual preferences. At the same time, we see that not all items show a substantial increase in permissiveness. There is only a modest increase when it comes to suicide, and with respect to adultery it is even negative. It would therefore be incorrect to equate a higher level of permissiveness with debauchery. After all, more respect for other people's lifestyles can be very compatible with a higher appreciation for (marital) fidelity. Our statistical analysis shows that the first five items form a scale (which we use below) whose score rises over the years. The score of this permissiveness scale rose from 4.6 in 1981 to 6.1 in 2008 (the score represents the average across the first five items in Table 6.7).

How do these changes in values relate to the process of modernisation? We already noted the diminished influence of the Christian religion, so the

Table 6.7 Development of sexual-ethical permissiveness in the Netherlands 1981-2008 (multiple items)

	1981	1990	1999	2008	Average	Trend
Homosexuality	5.63	7.18	7.83	7.70	7.12	Positive
Abortion	4.35	5.24	5.48	5.38	5.12	Positive
Divorce	4.78	6.08	6.65	6.49	6.02	Positive
Euthanasia	5.41	5.90	6.69	6.70	6.21	Positive
Suicide	3.24	4.33	4.36	3.92	3.93	Positive
Adultery	2.62	2.80	2.65	2.23	2.54	Negative

Source: EVS NL 1981-2008

Note: Adultery refers to married people having an affair with another person.

25 Halman & Luijkx 2007, p. 11.

increase in permissiveness may be attributed to secularisation. Churches and church leaders no longer have the authority they enjoyed in the first half of the twentieth century, and a growing number of Dutch people are choosing to form their own opinions when it comes to private matters. Besides this negative explanation (less traditional morality), we can also draw a more positive conclusion. The questions asked in the survey all have something to do with the quality of life. The acceptance of homosexuality presupposes that sexuality is a value in itself. Sex serves not only to ensure the survival of our species, it can also be a form of self-expression. Because having children has become a matter of conscious decision-making, objections to abortion have declined. Precisely because people are putting more emphasis on the quality of marital relations, the old taboo against divorce no longer holds up to scrutiny. And for the same reason, people should think twice before committing adultery. The increased focus on human dignity has also led to euthanasia becoming acceptable for many people. In other words, we can see the outcomes as the result of a trend towards vitalisation, in which we have increasingly higher expectations of sexual relations, of having children, and of life in a more general sense.²⁶

We have tried to verify this conjecture using statistical analysis.²⁷ Although we should have looked at both dimensions (religious vs. secular as well as survival vs. self-expression), it would be pointless to examine the first dimension. The link would be tautological because items in the area of sexual-ethical permissiveness are an integral part of Inglehart's secular value orientation. The indicator of acceptance of abortion, for example, is also part of Inglehart's religious-secular scale. For this reason, we have limited ourselves to the second dimension. The conclusion of our analysis was that both the level of education and self-expressive values were positively correlated with permissiveness. The higher the level of education of the respondents and the higher their score on the scale of expressiveness, the less difficulty they had with the above-mentioned behaviours. Together, these two factors explain 44 percent of the trend. We can also examine the influence of church attendance. Churchgoers turn

26 See also chapter 3, section 4.

27 We made use of a so-called intermediation model: we examined whether the relationship between two variables (X and Y) can be explained by a third variable (M). If that is the case, the effect size of X should decrease between the model without M and the model with M. The degree of the decrease indicates the extent to which this can be explained. In this case, we look at whether the trend in permissiveness (or the effect of the measurement year) can be explained if we incorporate the survival – self-expression variable (M) in the model.

out to be much less permissive than non-churchgoers. We might say that the decline in the number of churchgoers is a partial explanation for the rise in permissiveness in the Netherlands. If we add church attendance to the model (in addition to education and self-expressive values), 61 percent of the trend is explained. Therefore we are inclined to see the wider acceptance of 'deviant' behaviour in the private sphere as the outcome of two combined processes: secularisation (i.e., the decline in traditional values) and the tendency towards vitalisation (i.e., the rise in education and self-expression).

6 Values of citizenship

According to some, processes such as secularisation or increasing self-expression lead to a form of societal degeneration. They argue that the disappearance of certain codes in the private realm has a negative effect on citizens' behaviour in the public realm. Let us therefore take a look at the development of citizenship. Can we say that the Dutch have become less exemplary citizens in the last thirty years? And if so, how is this related to trends such as secularisation or vitalisation? We should keep in mind here that the term citizenship contains multiple aspects. Sometimes the emphasis is on the social aspect: for example, how people interact with people they barely know (etiquette) or whether they are willing to help their neighbours (readiness to help). At other times, the emphasis is on the political aspect: for example, whether people participate in the democratic process (elections) or rise up against injustice (civil courage). Let us begin with the second aspect and determine what the Dutch (and other Europeans) mean by good citizenship.

In table 6.8, we present the relative importance that respondents in a number of West European countries assign to characteristics of 'good citizens'. Examples include participating in elections, articulating one's own opinion, helping people who are worse off and being politically engaged. We see quite a substantial degree of agreement in their responses: in almost all countries, articulating an independent opinion comes at the top (average score 15), followed by obeying laws and regulations (average score 11) and participating in elections (average score 10). Remarkably, nowhere in Europe is membership in a volunteer organisation (average score -14) or being active in the political arena (average score -28) considered a crucial part of good citizenship. The scores for the Netherlands largely correspond to those of the average, although the score for obedience to laws and regulations is lower

Table 6.8 Relative importance^a of six characteristics of 'good citizenship' in ten West European countries

	Opinion ^b	Vote ^c	Laws ^d	Help ^e	Active ^f	Political ^g
England	17	7	18	3	-14	-31
Sweden	19	14	13	6	-23	-30
Denmark	15	15	12	5	-20	-27
Germany	21	9	8	6	-19	-25
Belgium	15	3	12	7	-9	-28
France	11	17	16	5	-13	-36
Portugal	12	-	3	10	-8	-17
Austria	19	12	8	6	-16	-28
Italy	9	5	15	8	-6	-30
Netherlands	14	8	6	6	-9	-25
Average	15	10	11	6	-14	-28

Source: European Social Survey 2002/2003

Note:

^a Figures refer per country to the deviations from the average importance for all attributes (b to g) on a scale from 0 (= not at all important) to 100 (= very important).

^b Articulate one's own opinion, independent of others

^c Participate in elections

^d Always obey laws and regulations

^e Help those who are worse off than you

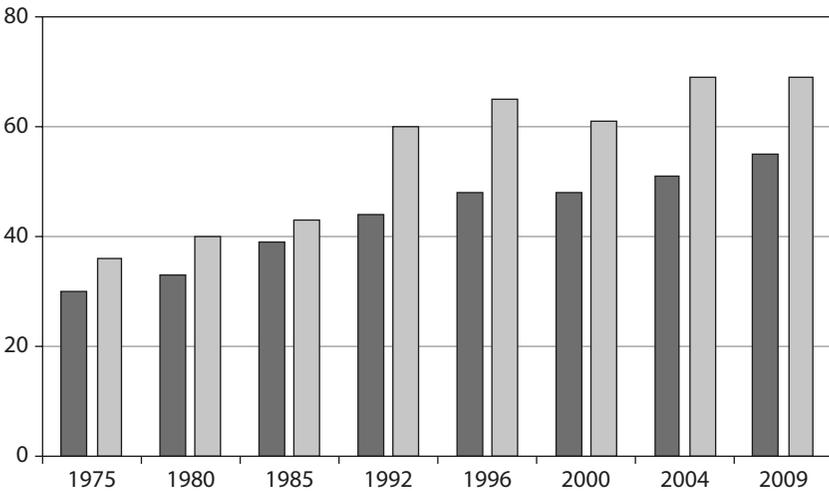
^f Be active in volunteer organisations

^g Be politically engaged

than the average and participation in a volunteer organisation is slightly higher than the average.

Other studies confirm that respondents assign relatively little importance to the political aspects of their citizenship. If you ask people to formulate what a good citizen is, the vast majority would not begin with politics. In the eyes of the public, a 'good citizen' is someone who can take care of him/herself, is not a burden to others and does not commit fraud. In positive terms, it is someone who shows sympathy for others, who tends to be helpful and socially engaged – especially in his/her own circle and towards the less fortunate. 'To vote' is mentioned indeed, but generally citizenship ideals in the Netherlands are seldom of a political nature. Nor do strictly private elements play a role: parents or partners are rarely referred to. Conclusion: according to Dutch respondents, good citizenship is actualised not in one's immediate environment but rather outside of one's private sphere. It has particular significance in the public arena, where people do not know each other but must develop appropriate ways of interacting with each other.

Graph 6.1 Willingness^a to protest (dark) or accept^b protest (light) within the Dutch population (16 years or older) 1975-2009^c



Source: Culturele Veranderingen in Nederland 1975-2008/9

Note:

^a Subscribes to the view that it is ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ probable that they would try to do something if parliament is in the process of adopting an unjust law.

^b Approves of someone deciding – due to a law regarded as unjust – to hinder the government’s work through protest actions.

^c In 1975, 1980 and 1985, the maximum age was 74 years; figures for variable b in 1980 are based on interpolation.

People in both the Netherlands and the United States expect good citizens above all to be ‘good neighbours’.²⁸

This means that public morals manifest themselves more horizontally than vertically: what matters is not so much the government as one’s fellow citizens. Put another way: ‘moral sentiments’ manifest themselves more in the social field than in the political field. All this does not mean that Dutch citizens simply have little interest in politics. Compared with other countries, their interest in politics is even quite strong. Nor does it mean that interest in the official channels (elections, membership in political parties, etc.) is limited. Graph 6.1 shows that the willingness to protest against the adoption of an unjust law has only increased over the years. This increase applies to both the willingness to take action oneself and the acceptance of protest actions by others. However, we should be careful not to exaggerate here. After all, we see that this increase occurred mainly between 1975

28 Schudson 1998, Wuthnow 1998.

and the turn of the century. From 2000, there is a levelling off, which may indicate a declining commitment to the public good – a phenomenon that has also been pointed out by certain commentators. Nonetheless, it is quite possible that the traditional protest actions have run out of steam and that, from 2000, citizens' commitment to the public good have simply taken shape in a new manner.²⁹

7 Decreasing tolerance

Given this emphasis on the horizontal aspect of citizenship, we would expect the interaction between citizens to be fairly harmonious. In addition, we would expect there to be a reasonable degree of tolerance. Remarkably, the data from the EVS point to the contrary. In chapter 4, we already determined that tolerance has declined in the Netherlands, as evidenced by how respondents felt about certain types of neighbours. In table 6.9, we examine the outcomes further.

Table 6.9 Objections (percent) to various types of neighbours in the Netherlands 1981-2008

	1981	1990	1999	2008	average	Trend
Neighbours of another race	9	9	5	10	8	not significant
Immigrant neighbours	17	10	5	14	12	Negative
Neighbours with a criminal record	17	29	32	50	32	Positive
Neighbours who drink heavily	51	59	59	66	59	Positive
Emotionally unstable neighbours	19	20	25	31	24	Positive
Neighbours with large families	6	8	8	14	9	Positive
Neighbours who are left-wing extremists	39	47	50	56	48	Positive
Neighbours who are right-wing extremists	35	53	69	68	56	Positive

Source: EVS NL 1981-2008

The issue here is not the actual acceptance but what kind of neighbours are considered less or more acceptable. Nonetheless, the results give food

²⁹ See, for example, the many social initiatives that have sprung up in the past ten years in the Netherlands. This phenomenon will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 9 (sections 7-9).

for thought. Objections to new neighbours have increased across the board – except when it comes to people of another race or immigrants.³⁰ This makes it all the more notable that respondents have become more critical on all the other points. Over the years, there appears to have been an increase in aversion to neighbours with a criminal record, those who drink heavily, those with many children, those who are emotionally unstable or those who hold extreme political positions (regardless of whether they are extreme-left or extreme-right). In other words: on all these points, tolerance has declined in what was traditionally a tolerant society. The items in table 6.9 form a reasonably good scale³¹ and clearly show an increase in intolerance. Significant differences between the various scores mean that we should exercise caution in interpreting them. It is unclear what factors account for these differences. It can be that Dutch people today do indeed have a different attitude towards their neighbours than thirty years ago. But it can also be that they simply assert their opinion on this matter more forcefully today than in the past. To clarify this, we investigate how intolerance, or the development of intolerance, is related to the process of changing values (in the context of Inglehart's theory).

It is difficult to predict in advance what the relationship between intolerance and religious or secular ideas could be. In various traditional religions, values such as compassion, self-sacrifice and charity play an important role. On that basis, we might expect a positive relationship between religion and tolerance. At the same time, one could question to what extent the notion of 'fellow man' extends in practice to the above-mentioned groups. Even traditional believers distinguish between an upright family man and someone who is addicted to alcohol or who commits crimes.

Using a regression analysis, we determined the effect of religious beliefs on tolerance. There turns out to be a negative and significant effect. After controlling for the second value dimension, this effect declined somewhat in degree but remained significant. In other words: respondents with a secular pattern of values were in general more tolerant than people who adhered to traditional religious values. One possible explanation is that, within the religious segment of the Dutch population, tolerance is limited to the

30 We have no way of knowing whether respondents gave an honest answer to this question, nor do we know whether their behaviour is in line with their opinion. Perhaps we are dealing here with politically correct answers.

31 Cronbach's alpha = 0.67.

circle of like-minded people and does not extend to 'dissenters'. In academic literature, this phenomenon is known as 'the dark side of social capital'.³²

When we apply this reasoning to the findings of our regression analysis, we see that the world of traditional believers is 'smaller' than that of secular-thinking citizens. For the latter, a neighbour with strange behaviour is simply part of society, while for the former the emphasis is on that neighbour's deviant behaviour. In this sense, we can expect secularisation to be accompanied by an increase in tolerance. Equally remarkable is the effect of values regarding survival and self-expression. One would expect that citizens who score high in terms of survival would have the ability to accommodate and adapt to others, just as we would expect citizens with a high score for self-expression to be more assertive and therefore less open-minded towards neighbours with deviant behaviour. If these expectations are correct, then intolerance would rise when people move from survival towards self-development. However, the opposite is what we find. The regression analysis indicates that intolerance declines when the value of self-expression among citizens rises. It is precisely the 'survivors' who turn out to be relatively intolerant. This correlation cannot be explained on the basis of respondents' level of education because that variable has no effect on tolerance. The only explanation appears to be that the anti-authoritarian and liberal values that tend to be associated with self-development entail more tolerance towards new neighbours.

Thus, the social dimension of 'good citizenship' leads to a number of striking findings. On the one hand, Dutch citizens place more importance on this aspect than on the political aspect of citizenship (that is, one's relationship to the government and the state). On the other hand, tolerance with regard to this aspect (that is, one's relationship to neighbours and fellow citizens) has actually declined. Moreover, it is not so much the secular Dutch that are becoming less tolerant but rather the traditional believers. This declining tolerance does not appear to be related to values of self-expression but rather to values of survival. Using an earlier characterisation, one can say that what we see here is the distinction between threatened and active citizens.³³ Those who have kept up in the process of modernisation (i.e., active citizens) turn out to be relatively tolerant of their fellow citizens (even in the case of deviant behaviour), while those who are confronted with the disadvantages of modernisation (i.e., threatened citizens) have become more intolerant.

32 See, for example, Portes 1998.

33 See chapter 3, section 8. A more extensive treatment of this subject can be found in Van den Brink 2002, p. 76-86.

8 Public morals stricter

Because Dutch survey respondents have relatively little interest in the political dimension of citizenship, one might conclude that they would be generous on this point and would, for example, feel less strongly about violations of the law. Table 6.10 shows an average score for various variables from the EVS. The score illustrates whether respondents consider a particular type of behaviour acceptable, varying between 1 (= never) and 10 (= always). One glance at this table is enough to see that there is an importance difference here with the outcomes of table 6.9. While there was a considerable variation in the acceptance of new neighbours (the share of those who object varied between 8 and 59 percent), this is much less the case in the acceptance of violations of the law, where the score varies between 1.39 and 3.28 on a scale of 1 to 10. Citizens are thus not so tolerant when it comes to violations of the law!

Dutch people do seem to be somewhat more tolerant of actions that serve one's own interests but that do not cause direct harm to others. This holds for matters such as lying in one's own interest, seizing opportunities for tax evasion, the use of drugs and fare-dodging. People are stricter when it comes to morally dubious business or if others suffer injury. This is the case with accepting bribes, abusing social benefits or joyriding. For these types of behaviour, acceptance remains relatively low. In addition, the acceptance of certain violations of the law such as lying in one's own interest, accepting bribes, and tax fraud has further declined over the years. Only in the case

Table 6.10 Acceptance of violations of the law in the Netherlands 1981-2008

	1981	1990	1999	2008	average	Trend
Lying in one's own interest	3.29	3.57	3.21	3.13	3.28	Negative
Tax evasion ^a	3.12	2.96	2.75	2.28	2.73	Negative
Drug use	2.03	2.20	3.09	2.82	2.55	Positive
Fare-dodging ^b	2.42	2.23	2.80	2.59	2.51	Positive
Bribes ^c	2.00	1.81	1.60	1.56	1.73	Negative
Social fraud ^d	1.45	1.61	1.52	1.52	1.52	n.s. ^e
Joyriding	1.31	1.47	1.36	1.41	1.39	n.s. ^e

Source: EVS-NL 1981-2008

Note:

^a 'Cheating on taxes if you have the chance'

^b 'Evading fares on public transport'

^c 'Accepting a bribe in the course of one's duties'

^d 'Claiming state benefits to which you are not entitled'

^e Not significant

of drug use and fare-dodging did acceptance increase. In other words, even with regard to the political dimension of citizenship, we see that the degree of tolerance has decreased rather than increased. The Dutch appear to have become more severe in their judgement over the years, whereas that judgement regarding violations of the law started at a rather low level already.

Does this trend also stem from the process of modernisation? Unfortunately, our regression analysis did not yield any correlation. None of the explanatory variables appeared to correlate with the acceptance of violations of the law. The clearest association appears to be the (positive) correlation with religious values. This suggests that citizens are less tolerant the more strongly they hold on to their traditional faith. In that case, a decrease in religious values should go hand in hand with greater tolerance. In reality, we see exactly the opposite. Violations of the law were accepted less and less over the years. Furthermore, this trend shows no correlation with the increase in the level of education nor with values of self-expression. Perhaps it should be interpreted as a sign that there should not be an 'everything-goes mentality'. Permissiveness appears to be conditional. With regard to respect for common goods, to things that can harm others, or to dishonesty, deceit and illegal activities, Dutch citizens were and are quite strict. Public morals thus remain high. This is evidently determined by factors other than modernisation. It may be related to the opinion of many Dutch citizens, already mentioned in chapter 4, that people have become more selfish and that they show little concern for others. According to the SCP, this opinion is widespread these days. This indicates not so much an increase in indifference or in bad manners on the part of Dutch citizens as engagement and the need for decency. Precisely because people are now so negative about dishonest behaviour, illegal activities and deceit, they take offence at this kind of 'antisocial' behaviour. It is thus not the case that the Dutch no longer know the proper way of doing things or that a mentality of 'everything goes' prevails. Instead, the dissatisfaction we have observed implies that deviations from the norm are not acceptable for many and that they take public morals seriously.

9 The significance of work

Based on everything we have observed so far, it is not difficult to predict that the value of work has also been subject to change. The transition from an agrarian to industrial society and then to a post-industrial one was accompanied by a shift in motivations for working. More specifically, the

old work ethic (working because one has to) was slowly but surely replaced by a new motive (working because I want to work).³⁴ However, this is not the only reason why work became less and less onerous. All European countries have managed to increase their level of prosperity in the second half of the twentieth century, while in many countries a welfare state has developed. In order to survive, therefore, work is not necessarily imperative. Paid work is, of course, still important for most people. This does not alter the fact that the current situation can hardly be compared to the period before the Second World War, when lack of employment often meant abject poverty. In addition, there are more flexible working patterns now. There is still the classic breadwinner model, but there are also households where both partners work fulltime, and there are those who can survive on a part-time job or people who take a year off, etc.³⁵ This makes it possible to go about work in a different manner and to see work as a vehicle for self-development. We also know that the nature of work itself has changed, in the sense that it has become more demanding. The modern employee is expected to bear personal responsibility, to show initiative and to have a flexible attitude in order to respond adequately to the sometimes rapidly changing conditions of the market.

To determine whether this development is actually occurring in the Netherlands, we distinguish between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* work motivations. Extrinsic motivation refers to when one regards work as a means to achieving goals outside of work. An intrinsic motivation implies that the aim of one's labour is in the work itself. Maslow's theory which we mentioned earlier plays a role in the background. The idea is that extrinsic work motivation corresponds primarily with Maslow's first two categories (i.e.: physiological needs and safety), while intrinsic motivation is more related to the last three categories (i.e.: love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation). There is a certain hierarchy here: only once the basic conditions such as job security, a good salary and safe work are met does one

34 This shift affects the research that numerous sociologists have conducted since Weber's famous thesis on the Protestant work ethic. Weber argued that the process of rationalisation and therefore the development of modern capitalism was strongly influenced by the values of seventeenth-century Protestantism. Moreover, he maintained that these values continued to have an influence into the twentieth century, with the result that the Protestant ethic still plays a prominent role (Weber 2003). According to this ethic, work is a central task in life that is handed down to us by God. On this basis, we would expect the Dutch to have assigned a less central role for work in the past thirty years, as the decreased influence of religious values would result in a weakening of the Protestant work ethic.

35 Cf. chapter 3, section 5.

Table 6.11 Share (percent) of Dutch who consider a certain aspect of work important 1981-2008

	1981	1990	1999 ^a	2008	average	trend
Good pay	55	70	72	76	69	Positive
Not too much pressure	38	40	33	48	41	Positive
Good job security	41	41	29	45	40	n.s. ^b
Good hours	37	45	37	60	46	Positive
Generous holidays	31	35	28	48	36	Positive
An opportunity to use initiative	44	63	62	80	64	Positive
A job in which you feel you can achieve something	28	45	40	66	46	Positive
A responsible job	29	46	42	54	43	Positive
A job that is interesting	41	61	56	74	59	Positive
A job that meets one's abilities	48	73	69	83	69	Positive
A useful job for society	39	48	39	59	47	Positive
Meeting people	44	65	61	73	62	Positive

Source: EVS NL 1981-2008

Note:

^a It is striking that most of the scores for 1999 are slightly below the level of 1990. The reason for this is unclear.

^b Not significant

come around to higher ideals such as self-development.³⁶ We have already seen that this distinction plays a role in Inglehart's theory, especially with regard to the second dimension of changes in values. The values linked to 'survival' correspond to an extrinsic motivation (working in order to provide a living), while the values related to 'self-expression' correspond to an intrinsic motivation (working as a means towards self-development). The prediction is that at a higher level of economic development, the extrinsic work motivation becomes weaker and the intrinsic work motivation becomes stronger.

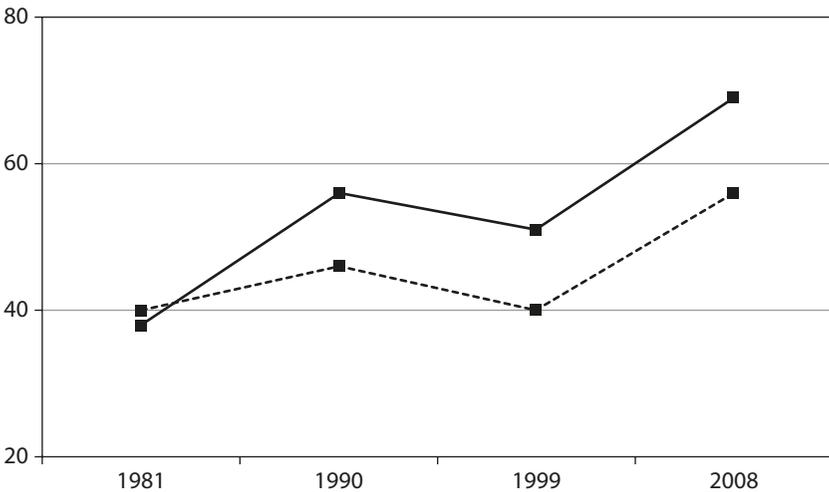
Unfortunately, the EVS does not specifically ask about intrinsic or extrinsic work motivation. The EVS survey questions always incorporate a concrete aspect, for which respondents can indicate how important it is to them. In table 6.11, we have assembled twelve of the most relevant items. Except for one item, all the listed motives became more important over the years. One example is the feeling that you have a job in which you can achieve

36 De Witte et al. 2003.

something (row 7). In 1981, 28 percent of the Dutch respondents considered this important, while in 2008 this percentage had risen to 66. In other words, in recent decades Dutch citizens have begun to consider more elements of their work important. One could rephrase this and say that Dutch people have become more demanding with respect to their work. While in 1981 an average of four items were mentioned, that number had increased to seven by 2008.³⁷

To investigate whether extrinsic and intrinsic motivations developed in the same way, we combined the first five items from table 6.11 into a scale that represents extrinsic motivation.³⁸ We also created a scale for intrinsic motivation out of items 6 to 11.³⁹ Graph 6.2 shows that, over time, both extrinsic and intrinsic motives are increasingly cited. At the beginning of the period, the percentage of extrinsic items was above the percentage of intrinsic items, but in 2008 this had been inverted. We can conclude that both motives have become more important since 1981 but that the growth

Graph 6.2 Dutch respondents (percent) who identify extrinsic (dotted line) and intrinsic motivations (solid line), 1981-2008



Source: EVS NL 1981-2008

37 Cf. chapter 3, section 4.

38 Cronbach's alpha = 0.69; average inter-item correlation = 0.31.

39 Cronbach's alpha = 0.77; average inter-item correlation = 0.36. We have left out the twelfth item in table 6.11 because it did not fit into both scales.

of intrinsic motives was much stronger than that of extrinsic motives.⁴⁰ Using regression analysis, we can determine the extent to which Inglehart's value dimensions (and the changes in these dimensions) have an effect. Our conclusion is that they play an ambiguous role in extrinsic motivation. There must be other processes that cause extrinsic work motivation to rise in importance (or cause them to be mentioned more often). For intrinsic motivation, the results of the regression analysis show that Inglehart's theory seems to hold. There is indeed a process of post-modernisation taking place in the Netherlands: the more strongly one adheres to values of self-expression, the more weight is given to intrinsic work motivation. An additional explanation can be found in the level of education. Because the average level of education of the Dutch population has risen, and because those with a higher education exhibit more intrinsic work motivation, this trend has gradually strengthened. After controlling for education, the effect of the first value dimension on intrinsic motivation is no longer significant.

10 Conclusions

In the previous chapter, we came to the conclusion that moral sensitivities had not disappeared in modern society but had simply changed in nature. It turned out that the vast majority of respondents adhered to higher values, even if they interpreted them in their own way. In this chapter we asked how much of their interpretation was determined by the process of modernisation and which socio-cultural characteristics may have had an influence.

At first glance, the normative landscape in the Netherlands shows a paradoxical development. On the one hand, the importance of traditional, mostly Christian-inspired norms has declined. As a result, many Dutch citizens espouse liberal principles when it comes to issues such as abortion, euthanasia or divorce. They also expect due respect when it comes to sexual preferences or how someone wants to live their life. Parallel to this, the significance of traditional values such as obedience or security has diminished, while modern values such as self-respect, independence and pleasure have become more popular. This would all seem to confirm the image of the Netherlands as a 'permissive society'. On closer inspection,

40 It is surprising that extrinsic work motivation is still rising in a wealthy country such as the Netherlands. After all, the theories of Maslow and Inglehart predict that once fundamental needs are met, mostly intrinsic motivations will develop. The Netherlands has for some time already reached the point at which fundamental needs have been met.

however, this image appears to be rather one-sided. There are numerous areas in which the Dutch have laid down high standards. This applies, for example, to honesty – a value that the Dutch have rated highly for decades. This is also true for matters that impinge upon public morals such as accepting bribes, committing tax fraud or abusing social benefits. The Dutch are far less tolerant of such transgressions. And finally, it also holds for misbehaviour in the private sphere such as lying, committing adultery or causing a nuisance, for which modern Dutch society is much harsher than one would expect for such a ‘permissive society’.

Expectations in the normative sphere are, moreover, gradually rising. We have seen many examples of this, including the expectations that modern citizens have of each other. ‘Good citizenship’ incorporates much more than just subjects obeying the law. It also implies more engagement in public affairs or in helping one’s fellow citizens. The readiness to object to an unjust law has steadily increased in recent decades, and many citizens would like politicians to take them more seriously. Their expectations have also risen on the points we just mentioned such as bribery, tax fraud, lying and adultery. The tolerance for this kind of misbehaviour – which was already quite low – has declined further in recent decades. This phenomenon underscores the fact that moral values also have a hard side: although Dutch citizens have more freedom now than in the past to live their lives the way they want to, they draw a hard line as soon as that lifestyle is at the expense of others or of the community as a whole. This is consistent with the remarkable and sharp drop since 1981 in the acceptance of neighbours with deviant behaviour: Dutch citizens are less and less likely to be understanding of neighbours who have come into contact with the law, are heavy drinkers, have many children, are emotionally unstable, or have extreme political views. And finally, we see the same trend in the significance of work. Over the years, there has been an increase in the demands being made of employees and the work they carry out. What is striking is that it is primarily the social and idealistic aspects of work that have gained in importance. As a result, the focus is now on (aspects of) intrinsic work motivation. In other words, what a modern society as the Dutch shows is not only that values can change in terms of substance but also that, compared to four or five decades ago, these values are both higher and more explicit on a number of points.

In this chapter, we have asked ourselves how this development can be explained. We used a theory formulated by Inglehart which distinguishes between two dimensions of modernisation. The first boils down to a shift from traditional religious values to more secular values (which is the result of the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society). The second

dimension involves the shift from values relating to survival to those that prioritise self-expression (which accompanies the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society). This theory appears to be broadly applicable to the Netherlands. First, the transition from traditional religious values to secular values occurred primarily in those generations born in the first half of the twentieth century. The relevance of this 'secularisation' process declined sharply with the post war generations. Our second conclusion is that the transition from survival to self-expression took place across the entire population, regardless of the generation. This is consistent with the fact that livelihoods in the Netherlands have improved since the Second World War, as a result of which individual citizens began to focus more on their inner values. Incidentally, this trend towards 'vitalisation' has continued to this very day: the younger the cohorts, the more emphasis they seem to place on values that prioritise self-expression. Assuming that the modernisation process indeed has two phases, we can establish that it has had a double influence on Dutch values. The 'negative' effect of modernisation was that the relevance of traditional religious values declined, while the 'positive' effect means that the relevance of individual values became stronger.

The validity of this interpretation is apparent when we look in more detail at the factors that play a significant role in modernisation. In comparing countries, it was clear that there was a correlation with socio-economic indicators. The greater the differences in income in the country, the stronger the preference within the population for traditional religious values. It turns out that values of self-expression develop more strongly if a country has reached a higher level of prosperity or if a large portion of the population has paid work. This link also exists at the individual level, with manual labourers or people with lower incomes more likely to adhere to traditional values, while white-collar workers or people with high incomes valued self-expression. The same holds true for education. A comparison of countries shows that the higher the level of education of the population, the stronger the acceptance of secular ideas was. And at the individual level, it was relatively common for people with a higher education to reject traditional ideas. They have a clear preference for secular values, and they consider self-expression important and prioritise intrinsic work motives. Although these modern citizens place high demands on others and on themselves in the normative sphere, they are at the same time quite tolerant. It is precisely the adherents of traditional-religious ideas who reject 'deviant' behaviour or modern freedoms in the private sphere. Our analysis shows that embracing self-expression and related values leads to an acceptance

of cultural differences, while it is precisely the 'survivors' who turn out to be relatively intolerant. In this sense, the process of modernisation has had a twofold effect on Dutch society. On the one hand, it has led to a greater acceptance of individual preferences with regard to morals and values. On the other hand, it has resulted in people taking their own moral and normative principles increasingly seriously – certainly compared with a few decades ago.

Part 4

7 The role of ideals in professional life

Heleen van Luijn & Nicole Maalsté

In this chapter we investigate how moral values and other ideals assert themselves in the modern workplace. The relevance of this question is not self-evident. For a very long time, it was thought that performing work and realising one's ideals were mutually exclusive. Philosophers such as Plato or Aristotle were greatly interested in moral values but did not believe that one could strive after them in one's work. In general, some members of society could practice moral values because others worked for them. This dichotomy continued to exist until well into the modern era. It also underlies the thinking of Karl Marx, who contrasted the 'realm of necessity' with the 'realm of freedom'. The first term refers to a situation in which people work because they are forced to, and the second to a situation in which they work in order to realise their essence. There is disagreement as to whether Marx considered this a fundamental antithesis.¹ He himself believed that people could not arrive at the realm of freedom as long as a capitalist economy existed.² In the decades that followed, there emerged different answers to the question of how we should think about the relationship between the two realms. Some thinkers believed a revolution was necessary: a situation in which people could realise their essence through their work could only be brought about once capitalism was replaced by a new society. Other thinkers favoured reform: if work could be reduced to a few hours per day, then one could realise one's essence in the time that was freed up. Still others believed that performing one's work and upholding one's ideals could go together in theory, but then only for a small portion of the population. In any event, the idea that large groups of people could genuinely pursue certain ideals in their work remained implausible.

This began to change three to four decades ago. The idea gained ground that practicing one's profession and taking one's ideals seriously were not mutually exclusive – not even in a society that remained capitalist. One of the first to defend this was Ronald Inglehart. In his book *The Silent Revolution* from 1977, he wrote that modern employees also aspire to fulfil

1 Marx 1969, p. 14-51, 130-163; 1974, p. 482-519; Marx & Engels 1972, p. 21-38.

2 Sayers 2002, p. 1-9.

immaterial values, partly as a result of the rise in the level of education.³ In later years this idea was substantiated with empirical data. As we saw in chapter 6, there was a noticeable change in employees' work motivation between 1981 and 2008: the importance of extrinsic work motivation rose during this period but that of intrinsic motivation increased much more. The immaterial aspects of work had gained in importance: when asked what aspects of work they considered important, respondents identified aspects such as having a profession in which you can show your initiative, having a responsible position, being able to deploy your capabilities and having a job in which you can contribute something to society. The traditional advantages of work such as many vacation days or job security were mentioned less often. It is possible that these assessments would be different today: it may be that the need for a permanent job has grown in recent years as a result of the economic crisis. But that changes little with regard to the thesis that the immaterial aspects of work have become more important than they were thirty years ago.⁴

What do we mean by immaterial aspects? And what is the connection with Adam Smith's moral sentiments? We shall answer these questions empirically by exploring how Dutch professionals perceive the significance of immaterial values in their work. Before this, we want to draw attention to a project that has been going on for almost twenty years and that deals with similar questions, the so-called *Good Work Project* developed by Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihaly and William Damon. For a large number of professions, they investigated what employees themselves consider to be 'good work'. They conclude that three qualities come together in such definitions of good work: it is work that 1) fulfils the highest standards in technical or craftsmanship terms; 2) is conducted in an ethically responsible manner; and 3) also has

3 '... we would expect value type to be more strongly linked with education than with occupation. Our data confirm this expectation in pronounced fashion: the percentage differences associated with education are nearly three times as large as those associated with occupation (...) Our 1973 data show, similarly, that the relationship between education and value type is far stronger than the relationship between income and value type. For the former $\gamma = 0.297$, for the latter $\gamma = 0.080$ in the ten nations as a whole' (Inglehart 1977, p. 75).

4 In chapter 6, we showed that post-material values have developed strongly in the Netherlands (see table 6.11). Shortly before the 2008 crisis, less than half of the respondents attached importance to aspects such as generous holidays (48 percent) or job security (45 percent). Aspects that were mentioned often include possibilities for showing one's own initiative (80 percent) and for demonstrating one's own skills (83 percent). If we were to hold a poll now, these shares would undoubtedly look different as a result of the crisis. However, it cannot be ruled out that the respondents would return to their assessments from 2008 once the effects of the crisis have faded away.

meaning for the person doing the work. It goes without saying that there are many forms of work that do not meet these high standards. Meanwhile, this approach resolves the old antithesis between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom by integrating the material and immaterial dimensions of work. Based on this model, we can also say something about the personal and moral dimensions of work in the modern era. Below, we elaborate on this in a number of sectors that are important for the Netherlands. Although we do not refer systematically to the *Good Work Project* in the US, the notions developed in that project accordingly play a role in our analysis.

In order to find out what values are valid in the realm of work in the Netherlands, we conducted interviews with 47 professionals, 15 of whom work for the police and 16 of whom are employed in the healthcare sector. We also spoke with 9 professionals who work for Rabobank, a Dutch bank, and 7 employees of ArboNed, an agency that carries out medical examinations. The first two organisations are part of the public or semi-public sector, while the last two are companies in the private sector. We took great care not to limit ourselves to one level within any organisation, so we spoke not only with professionals in the field but also with managers and mid-level employees.⁵ Our interviews were primarily about what values, ideals or spiritual principles play a role in the practice of their profession. We made use of semi-structured interviews that were then literally transcribed. These transcriptions are the basis of the insights that we show below. We first talk about values that relate to integrity (section 1) and the circumstances that make it difficult to act with integrity (section 2). We then discuss the value of social commitment (section 3). We also dwell on how integrity, social involvement and vitality are given shape in the private sector (sections 4, 5 and 6). Then we look into how conversations about moral values are organised at work (section 7) and what role the mission statement fulfils (section 8). Following an explanation of the significance of professional codes of conduct (section 9), we bring the chapter to an end with several conclusions (section 10).

5 A few words about the way in which positions in the public sector were distributed. We held 31 interviews with employees from four hospitals and three police forces. The interviews lasted over an hour and were conducted at their workplace. Within each hospital and police force, five employees were interviewed, with the exception of one institution where only one employee was involved in our study. In terms of their job levels, we spoke at the hospitals with the chairman of the Board of Directors, a doctor, a nurse, a medical psychologist and a spiritual counsellor. Within the police forces, we spoke to the deputy police chief, a district chief, two team leaders and a group leader. The respondents were chosen by the institutions themselves. Given the limited number of interviews, it was not possible to determine whether there was a relationship between the employees' ideals and their job level.

1 Integrity and openness

To begin with, our research shows that today's professionals are quite clear in their statements on the role of values and ideals in their daily work. For most of the interviewees working in the public sector, their profession was a conscious choice. Some had known already at a young age that they wanted to become a doctor or a pediatric nurse. Others had worked elsewhere before starting work in the healthcare sector. A few had pursued extra studies in order to be able to work in a hospital as a psychologist or as a spiritual counsellor. At the police, the situation was slightly different. A few respondents had already joined the police force when they were sixteen. There were also those who made a conscious choice for the police force – sometimes on the back of disappointing experiences elsewhere – because they wanted to contribute to society, because they wanted to do something for other people, because justice and honesty were important values in their youth or because they wanted to help their fellow citizens. Others were attracted to the diversity of the work, the adventure and the thrill associated with police work or because they wanted a job in which physical aspects played a role. All in all, the majority of respondents working in the public sector were clearly motivated when they started their careers. Our interviews also revealed that this motivation remained more or less unchanged over the years. Almost all respondents are still committed to their ideals.

One might assume that working at the police or in healthcare presupposes a certain idealism that plays less of a role with employees in the private sector. But this seems not to be the case. Private sector employees also spoke highly of the ideals that they try to realise in their work and the motives that pushed them towards a particular job. Although not all respondents were asked, we can deduce from the interviews that the majority of those interviewed made a conscious choice for their work as well as for the company for which they work. Most employees we spoke with at Rabobank could not imagine doing the same work at another bank.⁶ One of the employees explains why she is so proud of working for Rabobank and how this feeling always manifests itself when she sees the Rabobank logo somewhere:

6 We would point out that these interviews took place before the recent affairs at Rabobank became known. In 2013, the bank suffered significant reputation damage due to the so-called Libor scandal involving the manipulation of interest rates used for interbank loans and a doping scandal involving a cycling team that was sponsored by the bank. These scandals debunked the claim that Rabobank could distinguish itself favourably from more commercial banks.

I take pride in my work, and in one way or another I'm also proud that I work at Rabobank. I already had this feeling, but it has grown stronger in the last two years. We have had the financial crisis, of course, but if you look at how strong Rabobank has remained and how engaged it is with the population. We have cooperative dividend payments; [sometimes] you read in the local newspapers what people were able to do with those payments and [how] you were able to help people in that way. I also think that we are very visible in the city. Whenever I see our logo I always say: 'There it is, the Rabobank.' That's something my family would confirm for sure. (Internal account manager for large companies, woman, age 29).

We see that ideals are an integral part of modern working life. But what exactly does this entail? Which values take precedence and which are less important? Because our interviews yielded a wide diversity of principles, we have organised the responses into a few categories. Table 7.1 shows how often certain values were mentioned during the interviews with those working in the public sector. The first category ('Integrity and openness') pertains to things like acting honestly, not pursuing one's own self-interest, doing what you've agreed to do and acting righteously. The second category ('Consideration for the human touch') includes values such as charity, service, collectivity and social commitment. In the third category ('Doing good and meaningful work'), professional qualities are at stake such as delivering solid work, making an extra effort, not limiting oneself to routines and always reflecting on things and thinking critically. In the last category ('Other principles'), we find principles such as not causing harm or upholding a particular faith.

Table 7.1 Distribution (percent) of statements in which certain values were mentioned by professionals working in healthcare and at the police

Values	Healthcare	Police	Abs.
Integrity and openness	17	83	66
Consideration for the human touch	70	30	57
Doing good and meaningful work	53	47	47
Other principles	47	53	32
Total	45	55	202

These figures show that our respondents assign great importance to matters such as integrity and openness. The first category includes one-third of

all the values that are mentioned. This is followed by motives such as social commitment and carrying out your work well. But there are also interesting differences in emphasis. It is mainly employees in the police force who talk about integrity and openness, while this occurs less frequently in the healthcare sector. The reverse is the case for a motive such as social commitment, as this is mainly mentioned by people working in the health sector and less so with those in the police force. This distribution cannot surprise us, given the fact that the police is focused on protecting law and order while charity has always been an important notion in the health sector. Finally, there are very few differences with regard to the wish to do good and meaningful work.

2 Problems with the organisation

Before we go into the details of how our professionals perceive these categories, we need to add a caveat. Our respondents approached the values they mentioned in both a positive and a negative way. Used in a positive sense, the values mentioned by the respondents were ones that they encountered in their work. When the values were mentioned in a negative way, the respondents said that they missed that particular value in their workplace or that certain values were being undermined by the way their work was organised. We were surprised to find out that such a negative opinion was given quite often. There were even respondents who did not want to talk about ideals because they thought it was too vague a concept. They would have preferred to look at everyday reality and how it can be improved. This does not mean that immaterial motives do not play a role with these respondents, for this becomes clear the moment a mistake is made. A 51-year-old clinical psychologist explains her attitude as follows:

I find 'ideals' a difficult word. I don't think in such terms, but when things go wrong or when abuses occur, that's what I want to dedicate myself to. Maintaining the human dimension in work is very important for me and something that I always strive for (Clinical psychologist, hospital, woman, age 51).

This respondent expresses an attitude that is often found in the Netherlands. Quite a few professionals have difficulty expressing spiritual principles. They simply want to do their work. But as soon as an ideal such as human dignity is violated, they know exactly what is wrong. It then becomes

apparent that, in practice, they do indeed have a number of ideals and that their criticism of the state of affairs in their organisation is motivated precisely by their ideals. Some complain about the lack of integrity in the health sector. A chairman of the Board of Directors of a hospital pointed out conflicts over money involving medical specialists who were only looking out for their own financial interests. A spiritual attendant noted that doctors conducting scientific research allow themselves to be influenced by the pharmaceutical industry. And yet another employee was angered by certain situations in the healthcare sector in which patients are not treated as equals – they don't get what they ask for (for example a request for euthanasia) even though their suffering is comparable to that of other patients. This is immediately denounced as unjust.

This 'negative' articulation of moral or social principles also occurs within the police force. Complaints about a lack of integrity are raised more often by police officers than by employees in the healthcare sector. These police officers allude to issues such as unclear application procedures, instances of discrimination, unfair treatment of colleagues, dirty jokes and sexual harassment in the workplace. They also mentioned managers who don't set a good example, colleagues who handled government money dishonestly, or police chiefs remaining in their positions even after incidents of mismanagement. Other examples include police chiefs who turn on their beacon light even when this is completely unnecessary, colleagues who practised cronyism and colleagues who look up information in police records for private purposes. Another complaint was that when a conflict occurs, cops don't talk it out *with* each other but do talk *about* each other. The respondents were critical of the organisational culture, where one can be troubled by something (e.g. discrimination) without there being an opportunity to talk it out with one another. Some practices were in conflict with respondents' sense of justice – for example the fact that you could be penalised for not meeting (unachievable) objectives set out in a working plan or that you are unable to wrap up a court case even though you can easily pinpoint the culprit. At first glance, all these negative examples would appear to contradict our claim that moral and social values play a prominent role within the Dutch police force. But on reflection, this precisely confirms our claim. The criticism voiced by the respondents in most cases does not stem from cynicism but rather from a deeply felt conviction that the police by its very nature should be the one to fulfil ideals such as honesty and justice. This goes hand in hand with the reason so many cops choose their profession: they want to contribute to making society more just, and when their own organisation deviates from this, they react in a particularly sensitive manner.

In other words, when professionals plead for honesty and transparency, this is often a way for them to point out things they believe have gone wrong. The importance of this 'negative' honesty is partly evident in the criticism many respondents have regarding the way in which their work is organised. We asked them not only what ideals come up in the practice of their profession but also what factors hinder or put pressure on the realisation of these ideals. Because this problem has already been extensively analysed in other publications, we will be brief here.⁷ Various respondents expressed their concern that spending cuts and market forces would lead to poorer healthcare. The hospital is increasingly becoming a company running its production process: and actually, there are insufficient resources to do one's job well. Patients can continue to expect the medical-technical aspects of healthcare, but not what is needed in addition to this. They must be vigilant and arrange many things themselves. Sometimes, consultations on when to be discharged from the hospital do not take place in a proper manner. In some cases, doctors don't know whether the patient has adequate care outside of the hospital, which could lead to patients being discharged too early. Unnecessarily long hospital admissions also occur. We hear similar stories from police officers. They argue that working with targets leads to dissatisfaction in the workplace and that managers do not know how to deal with the situation. They also complain about the shortage of manpower, which puts the quality of their work and their job satisfaction under considerable pressure. This means, for example, that they cannot treat everyone in the proper manner, or that mistakes are made which lead to suspects needlessly being set free. This is irritating, especially when they have worked hard on the case. In other words, respondents from the public sector express quite some criticism. Some prefer to say what is going wrong in their organisation rather than outline in a positive sense what their own ideals are. But that does not detract from the fact that their criticism is fed by ideals and that, upon further questioning, they do end up expressing these ideals.

3 Social commitment

Honesty and transparency can be defined as formal values, for they indicate *how* someone applies certain principles but do not tell us which principles we are talking about. Nevertheless our respondents also talk about more

7 See the various studies published by the Stichting Beroepseer (Van den Brink et al. 2005; Jansen et al. 2009; Jansen et al. 2012).

substantial values, particularly about humanitarianism. Professionals must pay attention to the needs of individual people and gear their behaviour to them. This is directly related to human dignity: the patient or client must be taken seriously and be accepted for who they are. As much as possible, their wishes and capabilities must be taken into account. These values were put forward by healthcare professionals twice as much as by the police. Respect for human dignity is regarded as one of the most fundamental principles in the healthcare sector. Professionals should always take into account an individual's personality and uphold the right to self-determination. It is telling that the chairman of a large hospital remarked:

You must show appreciation for the individual. Respect and dignity are very important. You must never make them secondary to something else. What the patient wants should override everything else (chairman of the Board of Directors at a hospital, man, age 59).

Our interviewees also gave more specific examples. The interaction between a patient and a doctor should have the character of a conversation between two adults. Doctors should not speak condescendingly to a patient or treat him/her as an ignorant child. Any special wishes that a patient or his/her family has should also be taken into account. For example, parents of a seriously ill child can be offered their own space in the hospital. The partner of a severely ill patient should be able to stay at the hospital for a longer period of time. In healthcare, the relationship with the patient is crucial. It gives those working in the sector the feeling that their work is of value and that it has an impact. This could explain why all sorts of registration systems, organisational issues and meetings tend to lead to exasperation. They are considered to be an extra burden or a necessary evil. A 51-year-old health psychologist comments:

It has to lead to something, something that is meaningful. Nowadays, you spend more and more time on bureaucracy and registration systems. It makes absolutely no sense to have to register patient contacts in three different ways. Almost every minute should be accounted for, it is an extra burden (health psychologist, hospital, man, age 51).

Although the police do their work under other circumstances, they also assign much value to the proper treatment of citizens. In their interviews, they emphasise the significance of human contact, a respectful approach, taking into account the person and human dignity. This obviously plays

an extra large role when a traumatic event has occurred or when your own colleagues experience something intense.

This emphasis on social commitment stems from a more general shift that has been occurring in the Netherlands in recent decades. The nature of this shift came to light in a study that researchers at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen conducted a few years ago. They made a list of fifteen virtues and investigated how often these virtues were mentioned in the Netherlands. The list begins with the four so-called cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, temperance and courage. The so-called theological virtues – faith, hope and charity – also belong to the list. The Groningen researchers added a few virtues that play a prominent role in modern life such as trustworthiness, caring, respect, openness, goal-orientedness and assertiveness. And finally, mercy, joy and humility made it on the list. The survey revealed that respect, openness, caring, trustworthiness and justice were the main virtues for Dutch people. Of the classical virtues, justice and charity (and to a lesser extent wisdom) were most important. Virtues that were rarely mentioned included faith, hope and temperance. The researchers concluded that there was a shift from more introverted virtues that had always been cultivated by Christianity to social virtues such as respect, caring and openness, all of which are crucial in modern society. The values of our own respondents fit into this pattern. Half a century ago, when Dutch society was still organised along pillars, professional institutions were very much attached to their ideological identity, certainly when it came to organisations in education or healthcare. But today, it is not ideological but social and professional ideals that employees prioritise.

4 Companies in the private sector

As mentioned, we also spoke with professionals working in the private sector. We had expected the above-mentioned ideals to weigh less heavily here because company culture in the private sector tends to be dominated by pragmatism, rationality and efficiency. Much to our surprise, this was the case only to a limited extent. In table 7.2, we show the values that were mentioned by private sector employees in the interviews. The first row ('Integrity and openness') refers to qualities such as being honest, not having prejudices, not pursuing your own interests and treating everyone equally. The second row ('Contribution to society') is about making a meaningful contribution, protecting the vulnerable in society or doing something for society. The third row ('Excellent cooperation') involves cooperating within

one's organisation, promoting a team spirit. The last row ('Commitment to customers') refers to developing a long-term relationship with clients and devoting one's full attention to them. Although the total number of mentions ($N = 116$) is more modest than in the case of the public sector, we see that ideals such as openness or integrity are once again at the top of the list and that this is especially true for the bank. In addition, the need to contribute to society is something that mainly generates interest at Rabobank, while the importance of cooperation and a commitment to customers were cited slightly more often by employees of the other firm we analysed. This firm provides medical services in the private sector and is called ArboNed.

Table 7.2 Distribution (percent) of statements in which certain values were mentioned by professionals employed at ArboNed and Rabobank

Values	ArboNed	Rabobank	Abs.
Integrity and openness	44	56	39
Contribution to society	30	70	30
Excellent cooperation	50	50	26
Commitment to customers	52	48	21
Total	43	57	116

It is not so strange that values such as honesty or integrity come in first place in the private sector. After all, business rests on the assumption that people speak the truth and keep their promises.⁸ This is certainly the case for the two companies that we examined in the context of this study. Both in banking and in occupational health services, employees must deal regularly with conflicting interests. It is impossible for them to always satisfy the wishes of all parties. Openness, honesty and clarity are indispensable preconditions in these circumstances. Our respondents interpret the concept of openness as not lying, not withholding information and not doing anything that could harm another.⁹ In this sense, openness is related to trustworthi-

8 Notice the interesting contrast between political mores and the mores of the business world. In the latter, trustworthiness and honesty are crucial preconditions for success. Those businesspeople who do not keep to their promises or are otherwise dishonest will eventually run up against serious problems. For politicians, the opposite appears to be more the case: they can rarely live up to their promises and can never be (or never want to be) truly honest. For a further exploration of this contrast, see Van den Brink 2015.

9 In all fairness, we must admit that Rabobank has not eluded the spate of scandals that have struck the financial sector in the last three or four years (see also note 6).

ness or integrity. This value requires one to act conscientiously. One of the respondents commented that she did not want to do anything that could give her a bad conscience. This is a self-imposed standard that she did not want to transgress. Furthermore, employees appeared to be strongly attached to authenticity. One bank employee described this as 'being honest with oneself.' The following quote shows how this is reflected in his work:

If I really rely on myself then I don't need to think about how I say or do something. That's also how it works with advising people. If I advise to the very best of my ability and I write down what we talked about, then I always know what I advised. And then I don't need to write it out or think hard about what I recommended. Because it's coming from within myself (Senior private banker, man, age 29).

Other respondents used terms such as 'courage' or 'looking critically at your own actions.' One of our interviewees explained that, when conducting business, he lets himself be guided by what he considers to be good. That can, of course, differ from what others believe to be good or right. In those situations, he prefers his own moral understanding. He views authentic behaviour as a high value and doesn't want to do things that do not fit him. In the quote below, he explains why he refused to implement a second reorganisation at his former employer. He could not agree with the decision to fire a large group of people:

There was no need for three hundred people to leave. There was another solution. I knew that. I'm not a modern-day Robin Hood or anything, but I had just sent four hundred people home in another reorganisation that *was* necessary. So it's not a matter of me not wanting to fire people. I just think it has to be legitimate to me. And of course, what I consider right may not be legitimate for another, but that is irrelevant. What is relevant is what I believe, because I'm the one who must carry it out. And if I can't justify it to myself, then I won't do it (staff member at ArboNed, man, age 55).

All this illustrates that modern professionals in the public and private sectors go about their work in a conscientious manner. There is no question that they are motivated solely by their own interests. Self-interest undeniably plays a role in these organisations, but in addition, they appear to be extremely focused on acting with integrity.

5 Social values on three levels

Apart from integrity, there are various other forms of social engagement. These arose mainly in the interviews with Rabobank employees. Many examples were mentioned in which the social engagement of their employer was highlighted. One respondent explained that a sense of social responsibility is reflected in Rabobank's standpoint on controversial issues such as human rights, the arms trade or nuclear energy. Other respondents pointed to the (financial) support Rabobank gives to numerous social projects:

At Rabo, we have cooperative funds for projects in the community. These range from small to large. It can be, for example, a community centre in a neighbourhood that wants to buy a pool table but doesn't have the resources to do so. Or an economic project aimed at putting a particular area back on the map. You're not working solely with money then but also with residents and people in the community centre or others for whom it is important. Looking beyond oneself is an action and an attitude that you also see in the Protestant Christian world. I would not want to be engaged exclusively in financial-technical matters – I would find that too poor, too little and too limited. At Rabo, you're also doing social projects for the benefit of others. (...) Employees are also carriers of our cultural heritage. Our employees must be attentive to others, that is *common sense* for us. Our people should not just be bankers but also socially conscious (head of a local Rabobank, man, age 47).

This theme is something we come across with more respondents: they are eager to contribute to society or do something meaningful. They gave various examples of initiatives started by the bank that have had added value on both a micro level (in relation to a client) and a macro level (in relation to society). One Rabobank employee told us full of pride how in the last 20 years he has helped small companies in Westland grow into large businesses.

These social values also need to be realised within the organisation itself. Almost all the interviewees described a good working relationship with their colleagues and teamwork as a plus, not only because this enhances the atmosphere but also because it contributes to the success of the organisation and of their own work. For the respondent quoted below, good relationships raise the performance of the team to a higher level:

I need to have a click with the people with whom I work – both within the group and with the management board. If there is no click, then you become islands sitting next to each other and you can't raise it to a higher level. You remain stagnant because you don't understand each other. Then you cannot develop anymore and you have to make a choice. So when my job stays the same while many new people come in with whom I don't have a click, then I may simply decide to leave (manager of corporate markets at ArboNed, woman, age 45).

Our interviews showed that this kind of connection does not come into being by itself and that an effort is required to keep it intact. Another noteworthy point is that many respondents do not limit themselves to their job responsibilities. This is evident from interviews in which they discuss various activities they have set up with colleagues outside of office hours, ranging from after-work drinks to volunteer work. Such activities contribute to a sense of commitment and togetherness.

Social values are also important when it comes to relations with clients. See for instance the way in which professionals treat their clients. One quality that received a high score is consideration for others. This is something ArboNed employees in particular emphasised. One of them tried to explain what she considers to be higher values:

... being attentive to each other and really listening to what someone has to say, putting yourself aside for a bit. You try to really understand what drives the other person or what is happening with him or her. I try to do this in my consulting room. That means that I'm not doing a thousand other things at the same time. I am completely there for that person. This is the type of quality I would like to maintain in the consultations that I have. Giving one's full attention also has to do with having respect for the person who has come to you to tell you his or her story (company doctor, woman, age 40).

This respondent interprets engagement as effacing oneself (temporarily), being there for another person, giving the other person the feeling that you are really listening. A different interpretation could explain engagement as putting yourself in the other person's shoes or showing that you empathise with the other.

Apart from what kind of attitude an individual professional assumes with his or her clients, there is the question of how an organisation defines this relationship. Does the employer emphasise short-lived contacts meant

to generate a quick profit or is a more long-term relationship emphasised in which both commercial and social values play a role? The latter was always an important part of the corporate culture at Rabobank, and it was considered an attribute that differentiated this bank in a positive sense from its competitors. In any case, a number of respondents pointed to situations in which Rabobank – in contrast to other banks – continued to support clients even when business was bad:

I've always made the conscious choice to work for a bank that is a cooperative. That means we are here to support our clients. If this is what you proclaim to the outside world, then you need to be able to trace back that value in the bank's operations. Not at the expense of everything, but if a client has been making use of our services for years and he is going through a difficult period, then you should not be the first to abandon him. That to me is an important value, not only vis-a-vis your client but also towards yourself. In good times and bad (account manager of corporate finance, man, age 54).

All in all, the interviews illustrate that social values play a significant role in the working lives of our interviewees, including the treatment of clients and colleagues and the promoting of collectivity and social engagement. All these values were mentioned by at least half of the interviewees. Qualities such as engagement, good collegial relations, openness and a good atmosphere were recounted by three-quarters or more of the professionals.

6 Vitality and spirituality

As we have seen, ideals such as integrity, social commitment, excellent cooperation, contributing to society and paying attention to individual clients, weigh heavily in both the private and public sectors. It is clear that the professionals in both sectors are not solely motivated by their own personal interest. They represent the shift that has been taking place more generally in the Netherlands in which the emphasis placed in the past on religious or philosophical values gradually makes way for secular values that correspond with modern forms of social interaction.¹⁰ This does not

¹⁰ See this chapter, section 3.

mean, however, that the more traditional values are completely gone or that social values are the only ones.¹¹

It is striking that many respondents working for Rabobank show some affinity with the Christian tradition. Values such as hope or mercy are not explicitly mentioned by them but they do point to humility and moderation. In addition, these employees are committed to motivations such as tradition or stability. They like to be able to work on the basis of certain traditional values. They are less sensitive to the issues of the day and fit well in a cooperative – the organisational structure that is at the heart of Rabobank. For some respondents, this longing for tradition and stability leads to a feeling of connectedness with the local culture. This was the reason for one of them to work for this specific bank:

Until we came to Tilburg, I had always lived in a village. We were raised at home with the farmers' bank and, after a while, the Rabobank. It simply never occurred to me to apply for a job at another bank. In addition, my father comes from an agrarian background. We were raised at home with ideas about cooperatives, and as a result, I never once considered applying to [commercial banks such as] ING or ABN. (...) You felt familiar with it. And I also felt that merchant banks were much more business-like. They served the shareholders, while the cooperative bank stems more from the idea of helping the peasantry and later the shopkeepers, to emancipate oneself (employee Rabobank, man, age 47).

With other respondents, traditional religious beliefs were more in the background. Certain interviewees showed an interest in religious or spiritual values but gave them their own definition, or they utilised a mix of values that were borrowed from Eastern and Western traditions. This was the case for an employee of ArboNed who brought up the concept of 'something higher'. She remained attached to the Christian faith but also drew inspiration from Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. The following quote reveals how her spiritual interest developed.

For me, the concept of something higher has to do with faith and spirituality. I've moved away from the Catholic Church because I can't accept a

11 Referring to the distinction we made in chapter 1 between moral and modern values, we note that many respondents work with a mix of both types. This situation is not an exception. One of the key messages of this study is that in many sectors of modern life, one sees a mix of modern and moral values.

number of things such as forbidding condoms and living a celibate life. We as humans have made something flawed out of religion, as can be seen by the sexual abuse that is now coming to light. But I do believe there is something more between heaven and earth. I don't know what to call it. It can be God or Allah, but there is certainly something more. We are not here for no reason. There are definitely lessons to be learned in life. Sometimes I combine things, because over the years you end up reading about these things, like Buddhism. I've travelled a lot, and then you also learn about other cultures. My father has Indonesian roots (...) We also had some experiences in Indonesia. That has made me more involved with spirituality, and it has also allowed me to develop a certain sensitivity in my work – something that has only become stronger in the last few years (social worker at ArboNed, woman, age 48).

While interest in religious values has waned or disappeared for many people, the opposite is the case for motives that stem from vital values, which are becoming more and more common. They tend to take two forms, one of which is an entrepreneurial predisposition. At both Rabobank and ArboNed, obtaining results and achieving success are important motivations for professionals. One of the respondents explained that he is always very pleased when steps are made in that direction. Another respondent indicated that he becomes irritated with people who cut corners. As a former Marine, he is very driven and he mobilises everything and everyone in order to achieve the desired goal:

I need to have a challenge. That challenge has to do with a purpose, for example generate a certain turnover. Achieving results is really my most important motivation. And that goal is sacred. I understand that I need all sorts of people for this who all have different interests and styles, so I try to mobilise them in a way that the goal is achieved (director of consultancy at ArboNed, man, age 41).

For the professionals we interviewed, not only the targets determined by management or by someone else seemed to be important. What was just as important were the aims that *they themselves* set and which they believe fit well with their personality, their way of working and their own identity. It therefore comes as no surprise that they attach great value to their independence. For them, autonomy is an important precondition for self-actualisation. What undoubtedly plays a role here is the high level of education of most of the respondents. One of the interviewees

at Rabobank explained that autonomy was an intrinsic motivator that increases the involvement of employees with the organisation because they have their own responsibility. This is why management stimulates personal responsibility and autonomy. The same holds for ArboNed, which has been experimenting with self-directed teams for several years. The teams have a significant amount of freedom to determine the direction in which they want to move:

Believing that people are cheerful and happier when they can influence their own daily work we made the choice for self-management. (...) I think freedom coupled with responsibility is the most important value. Your personality does need to fit with this. Sometimes you come across people who would rather have a boss that tells them what to do. If you think that way, then you shouldn't work here because that is not what you are going to get (staff member at ArboNed, woman, age 45).

Vital values not only lead to an active and goal-oriented attitude towards work, they are also expressed in the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle. Values such as inspiration or drive, finding the right balance, or practicing a sport were mentioned relatively often by ArboNed employees. For a value such as inspiration, this is not strange. For some time now, inspiration has been key to the way the company operates. Its significance is actively brought to employees' attention, and many activities are organised in order to promote inspiration. In addition, numerous interviewees referred to the quest for a healthy life or playing sports. They explained that they liked to exert themselves physically after or alongside their work, also because they usually only use their minds at work. Again, people are searching here for the right balance. A number of interviewees said that they regularly exercise after work. They do so in order to stay healthy and to get new energy, which ultimately allows them to do their job better.

7 Forms of moral deliberation

So far we have focused on the values or principles that professionals themselves find important. But managers are also increasingly committed to ideals. At hospitals and in the police force, numerous consultations take place in which employees can exchange ideas on moral questions. Sometimes this involves seminars, training or courses that take place outside of the organisation and where a specific topic is discussed. Sometimes it

takes the form of meetings that are integrated into the ordinary course of business. An example of the latter is the 'Ethical Council' that hospitals work with or the 'Moral deliberations' that are organised per department. We noticed in the interviews that this is a key theme within the healthcare sector. This was confirmed by the chairman of a hospital:

We have leadership programmes for those on the Board of Directors. There are also programmes for managers. The aim of these programmes is that there is some reflection on the question of why you are here on earth. You need to periodically ask each other such things. It helps you to judge the more everyday things, you can see them in a proper perspective (chairman of the Board of Directors at a hospital, man, age 54).

It is not only the managers who discuss moral values or ideals; such discussions also take place among regular employees, for example when they exchange thoughts during their coffee breaks or when they ask each other for advice on less straightforward cases. A wide variety of topics are covered in such conversations. Many conversations deal with the issue of what kind of attitude you should adopt as a health professional with your patients. Issues such as hospitality or accessibility are also often discussed. Our professionals regularly exchanged thoughts on ethical dilemmas and normative topics. Philosophical topics are also dealt with as well as questions about the relationship between work and faith. All in all, we conclude that morality is often discussed in the healthcare sector and that such conversations cover a variety of topics.

We see the same thing in the police force, where one or two-day meetings are held at which moral issues are discussed in order to professionalise the police force. But such moral questions could just as well arise during the daily meetings. In management teams or in meetings among senior police officers, various topics are covered such as discrimination or citizens being treated improperly, but also the question of what motivations led you to choose the police as your profession. It could be about an arrest that got out of hand or about the consequences of the creation of a National Police.¹² A 53-year-old director of a police corps cites the example of what is on the agenda for the broader circle of police managers.

12 To be clear, we would stress that our interviews were conducted before 1 January 2013, the day on which the various regional police forces were brought together under a newly formed National Police.

Soon we will be talking about connecting. It is not about a concrete topic that we are having trouble with, but about the question of how we view each other. About connecting with each other but also with the management. There are also informal groups where this happens, for example the meditation group with six members that meets every Monday morning. We read a passage from the Bible and discuss how we personally feel about it (director of police corps, man, age 53).

That these topics are often discussed is presumably due to the many organisational changes that were implemented in the last ten years in the police force. Much has been done in the area of increasing efficiency, achieving targets and improving business operations. According to some, this has put traditional police work under pressure. It has led to officers regularly talking about the normative side of their work outside of the formal consultations. A comparison with the healthcare sector shows that hospital meetings often have an institutional format, but this is much less the case with the police.

Although professionals in the private sector tend not to discuss moral issues very frequently, issues associated with morality were periodically discussed. This occurs at Rabobank in the form of so-called bank days that are organised every year. On these days, employees are placed in groups of some 80 people and are given the opportunity to express their views on matters affecting the company. One respondent noted that not all employees have the courage to say what they think, but that she herself has no problems with this.

In April we had a bank day where, for example, the question was posed: 'What bothers you the most about all these changes?' Then you are allowed to raise your finger and you go to a flip-over and colleagues can come and stand beside you. I don't have such a problem with that. But you do notice that the majority find it difficult to stand before a group of people and to express their opinion. I can understand that you may not dare to do so if you just started working here. But if you have worked here for a longer time, then you have a better sense of what can and cannot be done and how you should and shouldn't formulate things. Or when it is better to keep your mouth shut. You then simply feel it. However I feel I can say anything here (internal account manager of large companies, woman, age 29).

In this example, the actions of one individual strongly influenced the way the discussion was initiated. We see the same at ArboNed, where employees

are strongly committed to idealism and inspiration. Inspired individuals are described as individuals who remain true to themselves and accomplish the task they have to fulfil on this planet. They are people who embody their moral values and thus can influence their environment. This is illustrated by a story told by a respondent about a team in southern Netherlands that was having problems. The manager was not able to make the group into one whole. After this manager left, another member of the group took over as leader.

He was a very inspiring person. Before he was often preoccupied with himself, with his own assignments and his own nice things. And suddenly this person was forced to open up everything and to move forward together with the group. And then something happened... He was able to project his energy onto the group. He has passion for his job. If you see him, you would say: 'Now *that* is a big guy.' He is always happy, you see him always shining and helping other people. Time is never an issue. He always seems to have room in his schedule. You see him doing this, within the group but also with clients. That team now gets the most interesting projects that they then work on together. So in the end that team is doing great and is busy with great projects, and he was a determining factor in that. (director of consultancy at ArboNed, man, age 41).

From these words we can infer that inspiration involves more than just the individual, it also involves whether that person has a positive impact on his environment. In that case, one's own idealism can work in an inspiring manner, allowing one to achieve a higher purpose together with others.

8 The mission statement

We are not suggesting here that professional organisations in the past lacked moral values or ideals. On the contrary, many organisations that were established at the beginning of the twentieth century in the fields of healthcare, newspapers or education arose out a form of moral commitment. The Catholic, Protestant, socialist and liberal leaders of the Dutch system of pillarisation emphatically pursued certain ideals, and they did so for a very long time.¹³ Until the 1950s, the religious or ideological imprint on

¹³ The concept of 'pillarisation' refers to a specific period in Dutch history when public life was dominated by large organisations based on ideological or religious ideas. The term refers to the

schools, hospitals, broadcasters and trade unions was evident. But that era has passed, and those imprints (if they still exist) are now often nothing more than a formality. This was due to two developments that occurred in the Netherlands. On the one hand, there was a process whereby the state became more important, as a result of which the functioning of professional organisations was increasingly determined by the policies of the government. On the other hand, these same organisations suffered from the effects of secularisation, which meant that the initial ideals for which they stood no longer appealed to professionals and citizens. This did not result in the emergence of a normative void. Especially in the last ten years, more and more institutions are choosing to formulate their own so-called 'mission statement' to make clear what values they aspire to as an organisation.

Our interviews reveal that the religious or ideological imprint of an institution means very little to most of the professionals working there. Can the same be said of the mission statement and the values or ideals that are set out in this manner? The first question we must ask, then, is whether professionals even know the mission statement. A second question is what effect the mission statement has on the way they work. The answer to the first question was definitively positive. Almost all respondents from the public sector were familiar with the mission statement of their organisation. A large majority also believes that the statement has an impact. But there were differing views on the question of its practical effect. Take the example of the chairman of a hospital whose mission was to be 'Caring and professional'. How is this noble objective translated into more specific decisions?

In concrete terms, we want to be the hospital for people who live around the corner. We want closeness: both figuratively and literally. We want to be the hospital with a smile, not a medical factory but an institution where the human factor is decisive (chairman of the Board at a hospital, man, age 59).

Translating the mission into visible action means that this hospital sets only a limited number of priorities. It focuses on a few large groups of patients who need care the most. All those interviewed from this hospital were familiar with the mission statement, while some even knew the accompanying key words such as quality, hospitality and treatment. But some respondents had certain reservations: they found the concepts to be rather vague.

fact that society was divided into separate pillars, each of which had its own social institutions and political party. In the 1970s, this way of organising public life came to an end.

Also within the police force, many employees were aware of the mission statement ('Vigilance and service'). In their opinion, translating this mission into their own actions was not difficult. Two-thirds of those who knew the mission statement felt that it had an effect in practice. Some even called the mission statement unnecessary because the values concerned are or should be evident to every police officer. A 46-year-old district chief agreed that the mission statement was indeed relevant in practice, even though he felt it was unnecessary to organise a special campaign to advertise the mission statement. As a matter of fact, the mission is something he always carries within him. As a policeman, the importance of service had always been clear to him.

But it is useful to be reminded of it time and time again. It has to be etched into our minds constantly, so in that sense it does have an added value. As an organisation, we are strongly inclined to look inwards. There is always much attention paid to our own operations, schedules, planning, etc. That easily gets first priority. But in fact it should be the reverse and you have to put the outside world's interests first. So you need to keep that vigilance and service in mind. In that sense, the mission is important (director of police force, man, age 53).

The general feeling is that more should be done with the mission statement, that the upper echelon needs to connect more with the workplace, and that management should do more (in terms of money and resources) to ensure that the mission statement is given teeth on the work floor. A number of hospitals prioritise the patient in their mission statement. This does not mean, however, that the patient does occupy a central position in the actual conduct of hospital employees. A few respondents felt that the organisation did not go beyond expressing good intentions. One 51-year-old clinical psychologist told us what she thought of this idea:

I have indeed seen that a number of times. When you come cycling up to the building, you see on the outside a large banner with words such as 'Good care for you!' That slogan puts the patient first, but in practice that is not always the case. It is in my head, don't get me wrong... And the patients also confront us with it. 'Weren't you supposed to deliver good care?' they ask. Yes, that is the aim, that is our logo. Even though the daily reality is far removed from that (clinical psychologist at a hospital, woman, age 51).

We observe similar tensions within companies in the private sector. According to ArboNed's website, the concept of inspiration plays a central role in this organisation. The company's goal is to inspire organisations and individuals by enhancing their inspiration and drive and thereby improving the long-term employability of employees. For all the employees we spoke with, the core of this message was clear. Above, we saw that six of the seven respondents considered inspiration to be very important. They feel comfortable with their company's mission statement. We would note, however, that most of those we interviewed were part of the staff and had actively contributed to developing this vision. One of them explains how this focus on inspiration takes shape in concrete terms:

If you look at our vision, increasing the productivity of people through inspiration ... That's something I believe in. That is the way it works. Inspiration is partly what you have in yourself, but it is also something you can give to others. So then you come to the principle of 'practicing what you preach'. But you have to support that in many ways. So you need to explain what you mean and clarify what you expect. You need to be able to apply it in a client situation. And that begins with the simple question that company doctors ask in their consulting rooms: 'Do you still like your job? Is what you are doing still interesting? Are you ill because of your work or are you ill because of something else?' That is what it is about. So that is what shows up at the smallest level (director of corporate markets at ArboNed, woman, age 45).

We learned that the mission statement is brought to the attention of employees in various ways. Days for reflection are organised in which employees can do a vitality scan or take part in workshops where they can start working on (their own) inspiration. Board members can have a day off to meditate and to work on themselves. They regularly get together for dinner in order to exchange thoughts on the direction the company should take. Most of the interviewees indicated that they truly value these initiatives and that they have resulted in a change in the way they see their colleagues.

The equivalent of this at Rabobank is the so-called 'Ambition statement', which was established in 1999 following a broad debate within the organisation. Compared with ArboNed, the mission statement and core values of Rabobank are described much more extensively. They are, however, formal concepts that do not immediately evoke feelings. This may explain why most of our respondents could not – or could only partially – cite them.

This does not mean that there is no common moral compass at Rabobank; there certainly is. All those interviewed referred to the cooperative ideas on which the organisation is based and which distinguishes Rabobank from other banks. This has an effect on the company culture. Our interviewees referred often to a family culture that is reflected in a sense of mutual engagement.

9 Professional codes of conduct

One final way to make professional and moral principles visible is to draw up a code of professional standards. This is increasingly done in both the public and the private sector. Employees in the healthcare sector have long been familiar with this phenomenon, with examples such as the Law on Medical Treatment Agreement, the Code of Conduct of the Netherlands Institute for Psychologists or the Code of Conduct for Spiritual Counselors in Care Institutions. There are plenty of hospitals or institutions that establish their own rules in order to encourage each professional to behave correctly. Within the sector, all respondents said they knew that there were codes of conduct and/or medical-ethical principles for their profession. This did not mean that everyone could list these codes or principles, but they knew very well that they exist.

A relevant question for us is to what extent professionals derive support from such codes of conduct. For most respondents, this appeared to be the case: only a few employees responded that the code did not apply to them. Our respondents did admit that they deal with the code in different ways. Some try to apply the code in their work, for example by using it in the evaluation of nursing techniques. Others focus on the code's guidance on how to treat colleagues or patients. Sometimes a booklet is produced to keep the code of conduct alive among the personnel. A code of conduct can be used to indicate what is and what is not allowed when caring for a patient. Moreover, the codes are a good guide towards thinking about privacy. There are, however, employees who have reservations about the importance of such a code. They believe that as a professional, you should primarily use your own insights and experience. And finally, a few employees were not interested in the code of conduct, admitting they never thought about it and never bothered to look something up. They believe that there is something seriously wrong if you need to consult such a code. You need to sense what you have to do and act automatically, without checking what the book has to say:

Take conflicts of interest. You realise immediately that something like that is problematic. You don't need a book with rules that tells you that something is and isn't allowed, do you? I do see it every now and then, and then I read through it. Occasionally there is a point made in it that makes me think: that's something new. But it does not occur that I need to adjust my entire behaviour (member of the Board of Directors at a hospital, man, age 59).

In the police force, we observe the same. All respondents turned out to be aware of the code of professional behaviour or the ethical principles relevant for their profession. Frequent reference was made to *Code Blue*, a booklet in pocket form with the code of conduct that had been introduced within the police force a few years ago. It deals with matters such as: integrity, discrimination, bullying in the workplace, temptations and external appearance ('Can a police officer walk around with a tattoo or a body piercing?'). But it also deals with higher values such as justice, reliability, respect, transparency and responsibility. Does the average police officer feel supported by such codes of conduct? The answer is almost always yes. There were only two interviewees for whom this was not true or only partly true. They described the code as a 'beautiful coatrack' that you can hang things on, something like the ten commandments that are in the Bible. But most of the other police officers were very positive about the code of conduct. They felt that it provided support if they wanted to confront a colleague about something. It offered clarity and certainty, as a result of which all employees were on the same page. Many officers emphatically stimulated the use of these codes.

In this respect, there was little difference between the two private companies we studied. At ArboNed, the codes of conduct turned out to be relevant especially for social workers and company doctors. Our interviews revealed that the codes of conduct were useful, and that it offered them protection in the difficult decisions that they faced from time to time. At Rabobank, our question about codes of conduct led to more diverse responses. Some respondents thought it was important, others said they made little use of it. Rabobank Group's website explains that the bank uses both internal and external codes of conduct that guide its employees in the way they operate. In addition, a number of special policies were formulated to respond to public issues such as a vision on remuneration, a policy on human rights and a scheme for whistleblowers. The bank also decided to implement a number of sector-specific codes of conduct, such as a statement on genetic manipulation, a statement on the arms

industry and criteria for the sustainable production of palm oil. And yet most employees we spoke with were hardly or not at all concerned with such codes. The rules on conduct had been set on paper, but they were not known to everyone within the organisation. One employee who was closely involved in the drafting of these guidelines felt that the implementation was not a success. Although all employees received a booklet, that was not sufficient for a proper implementation. Moreover, a number of items were considered so self-evident that no special code of conduct was thought to be necessary for them. Take the example of the rule that you must handle client information confidentially or that you must not act in your own self-interest. These kinds of principles are completely obvious to all employees.

Apart from their relation to clients, our interviewees referred to activities that were rejected or projects that were not taken on due to ethical considerations. One employee, for example, was very positive about the fact that Rabobank does not do business with companies guilty of using child labour or deforesting the planet. In his opinion, social engagement and the company's reputation go hand in hand in such cases. Another employee is proud of the fact that Rabobank only supports responsible forms of sport.

10 Conclusions

In this chapter, we tried to find out which values or ideals are essential for Dutch professionals. This question may come as a surprise to our readers, because there are so many employees who are critical of their organisation or company. They complain about the effects of market forces in the healthcare sector, about the setting of targets in the police force, about the recurring budget cuts and the needless bureaucracy. All of this does not make the pursuit of moral ideals or other values easy. Some respondents even said that they have no ideals – they simply wanted to do their job. A closer analysis shows, however, that this attitude is not based on cynicism. Many professionals struggle with the situation at work precisely because they espouse a number of ideals. These are the same ideals that made them once choose a job in the police force or in healthcare and that make them proud to be a part of the organisation where they work. So what are these ideals they hold?

To begin with, modern professionals are strongly attached to values such as integrity and openness. For the private sector, this is only natural.

Those who work at a bank or perform medical examinations must exhibit a significant degree of honesty. Conflicting interests sometimes arise or different priorities present themselves, which must be dealt with by professionals in a clear and fair manner. Such values are not something that need to be applied from the outside – acting conscientiously is something that many professionals do on their own initiative. They are not willing to act against their conscience in their work, and they expect their manager to respect this. If that is not the case, it leads to criticism. Some respondents believed that there was a lack of integrity within the police force. This was because certain complaints from the workplace were ignored, while some managers were mainly concerned with looking after themselves. This kind of criticism is most likely caused by high expectations. This dissatisfaction can partly be explained by the strong sense of justice that the average police officer has. It underlines our conclusion that a value such as integrity is highly prized by modern professionals in the public and private sectors.

If we look at the normative *content* that professionals prioritise, then it is primarily social values that are given importance. These have an impact at different levels, for example at the macro level where a professional organisation makes a contribution to society. That goes without saying in the case of public and semi-public institutions such as the police or a hospital. After all, these institutions are justified by the fact that they promote public values such as health and security. But we also came across this value among Rabobank employees who proudly noted their company's response to controversial issues such as the arms trade or violations of human rights. At the meso level, social values are important because everyone aims to have good relations with their colleagues. Today's professionals believe strongly in the importance of forming a work community and paying sufficient attention to the human aspects of work. And at the micro level, social values are important because our respondents prioritised their contact with individual clients. In the private sector, focusing on the client is key. And in the public sector, human dignity plays an important role. Within the police force, much attention goes to treating citizens in the right manner. And in the medical practice, one should accord the utmost respect to the person behind the patient. Our conclusion is that moral values are an integral part of the modern services sector. Those who want to work as a professional in this sector must show a high degree of social commitment.

This does not mean that other ideals were out of the picture. Some of our respondents had a clear interest in values that we described in

chapter 2 as religious or spiritual. Some drew their inspiration from the Christian faith, although they interpreted this tradition in their own way. Others adhered to a mix of ideals from Western and Eastern traditions. But in general, these kinds of values remained in the background. That was not the case for ideals that we characterised as vital, which were mentioned quite often. Two variants of this value type stood out in our interviews. First, the pursuit of vitality was reflected in an entrepreneurial predisposition. This was particularly the case at Rabobank and ArboNed, where our respondents mentioned the obtaining of results and the achieving of success as important motivations. Second, vital values were also at work in the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle. Our professionals attached great importance to a good balance between their work and their private lives, and many of them participated in a sport. In their orientation, they are certainly not alone: the Netherlands has undergone a shift in recent decades from religious-inspired values towards social values such as respect, trustworthiness and caring as well as personal values such as authenticity and honesty. In this sense, we can say that moral sentiments are explicitly present throughout society. Our conclusion in this chapter is that these sentiments also receive attention in the practice of one's profession and that they have a significance that goes beyond the individual.

And finally, we noted that the discussion on ideals is highly developed within organisations. The traditional ideological imprint of many institutions no longer has significance. Far more relevant is the mission statement, by which an organisation announces what values it would like to convey and promote. Employees are given frequent opportunity to exchange ideas on this, both at a formal and informal level. At a formal level, the company organises an ethical council, an annual meeting or special courses that deal with moral dilemmas. Informally, discussions take place around the coffee machine or experiences are exchanged during work meetings. From our interviews it was clear that almost everyone knew the organisation's mission statement. Most respondents also felt it had a clear impact. Some interviewees remarked that their organisation could do more with its mission statement. A few said that such a statement was unnecessary because real professionals should carry the values in themselves. There was, however, absolutely no disagreement about the relevance of these values themselves. We can draw a similar conclusion with regard to professional codes of conduct, which are now being drawn up more frequently than a few decades ago. Almost all employees were familiar with them. Many respondents said explicitly that they benefited

from such a code of conduct, as it ensures that employees are all on the same page and it makes it easier to address a colleague about something. In this case as well, there were some respondents who felt that a code of conduct was not needed because true professionals should know very well what constitute the key values. All in all, we can conclude that attention for moral issues is highly developed in the modern workplace. We only have to compare our present ideas about professionalism with ideas from the past to understand that a one-sided stress on the material dimension of work has disappeared.

8 Moral imagination at work

Karen Woets & Heidi de Mare

Moral reflections have always been popular in the Netherlands. This was already the case in the seventeenth century, when many citizens became concerned about the wealth that had suddenly befallen them.¹ A telling example is the work of Jacob Cats, the then grand pensionary of the States of Holland. Cats wrote a book on marriage, of which many editions were published and which was received well by the general public. The book was richly embellished with emblems and engravings, and was translated into French, German and English soon after its publication in Dutch. A connoisseur of the classics, Cats developed an erudite vision of the public significance of home and family. He used a broad repertoire of stories, anecdotes and reflections, taking his readers – men as well as women – in a rhetorical way to an imaginary world in which one's own life, marriage, and the roles of men and women are reflected upon. Cats wrote within the framework of early modern views on good and evil, appropriateness and inappropriateness, honour and dishonour. He discussed not only everyday matters but also passions, natural differences between men and women, and the relationship to God. Although Cats' book is often dismissed as oppressive 'moralism', it constitutes an attempt to offer the reader re-creation in the classic sense of the word: to ensure that citizens, through reading and contemplation, can achieve an Aristotelian balance. The idea is for the reader to pick up on and adopt the many roles discussed (as one half of a couple, as parent to one's children, as citizen of the city, and as believer in God) in his or her own life. This moral development can only be achieved by addressing the reader's imagination in both an affective and a cognitive sense.²

1 It goes without saying that our reference to the early modern period does not imply that the genre of moral reflections was first invented only then. Indeed, the history of moral stories goes back much further. See, for instance, Andre Jolles' work, in which he distinguishes between nine basic story forms (myth, legend, saga, fairy tale, etc.). Initially, these genres were transmitted orally. After they were first written down, they kept developing, and still exert an influence in the present day and age. Of Jolles' categories, the fairy tale (and the related fable) is a prime example of the moral story (Jolles 1968). We would also point out that the story plays a central role in our moral and religious development. The fact that people need stories to transmit values and experiences is recognised by many different authors adhering to divergent schools of thought.

2 De Mare 2012b, p. 176-251.

While Cats provided civic life with moral imagination in a positive way, there were also many clergymen in the Republic who rejected the sudden wealth on religious grounds.³ Their main tool was the sermon, a medium that in those days exerted a significant influence on public opinion. According to Jelle Bosma, the sermon was a medium that reached virtually everybody.⁴ Initially, clergymen were eager to show that they had received a classical education. Their approach was mainly based on the exegesis of texts, and their aim was to defend eternal truths, regularly referring to the Old and New Testament. However, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the nature of the Dutch sermon began to change. A similar change had already taken place in other countries, for instance in England, where at the end of the seventeenth century the dark style of Puritanism was replaced by a more accessible style. Sermons were increasingly delivered in clear, straightforward language and revolved more and more around the practical aspects of Christianity. By the end of the eighteenth century, this approach was also adopted in the Netherlands. Sermons became an educative medium that was primarily aimed at changing people's behaviour. Clergymen were no longer expected to proclaim unshakeable truths but had to communicate with their parish in clear language and to urge their fellow believers to adopt a more disciplined lifestyle. To this end, they used cognitive as well as affective means: they had to appeal to the hearts of the congregation's members as well as their minds.⁵

Subsequently, the spectrum of moral reflections kept on expanding. In the nineteenth century, cheap publications and periodicals became widely available, creating a new moral sensitivity. We already discussed the role played by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the abolishment of slavery.⁶ Appeals to the imagination were also made in the effort to abolish the death penalty in the Netherlands and, later, when the first attempts were made to rescue so-called 'fallen women'. Time and time again, texts, speeches and vivid descriptions were employed to mobilise feelings of compassion and charity, which increased pressure on the authorities to take appropriate legal measures.⁷ This was also felt in the realm of religious life. In the nineteenth century, Protestants in particular developed a strongly intuitive sense of morality. Many Protestants abandoned the old notion of sin and

3 Schama 1988, p. 295-375.

4 Bosma 1997, p. 81-82, 131.

5 Bosma 1997, p. 18, 265-267, 284-287, 291-293.

6 See chapter 2, section 8.

7 Hoekstra 2005, p. 21, 113.

prioritised a New-Testament-based message of loving thy neighbour.⁸ They wanted to practice this here on earth, which meant that a relationship had to be established between moral and social questions.⁹ The feminist movement also played a role in this. Even though feminists were battling for their own place in the public domain, they held an ideal of civilisation that transcended the differences between the sexes. They pursued moral reform with chastity, a sense of duty and compassion as the basis for a new kind of citizenship. The feminist movement culminated in success in 1919 when women were finally given the right to vote. All in all, the national consciousness underwent some far-reaching changes in the nineteenth century, changes that never would have taken place without the imaginative representation of social misery in popular literature and the melodramatic rhetoric of religious leaders.¹⁰

This process would only accelerate in the course of the twentieth century. Various new media came into being, which resulted in just as many innovations in the moral imagination. We only need to remind ourselves of the increasing use of photography, radio, television and the Internet to realise that the spectrum of communication channels has broadened considerably. Moreover, the range and pace of communication have increased enormously. A century ago it took several weeks for a dramatic event to elicit responses in other parts of the world; these days it only takes a few hours. Parallel to this, the pace at which moral opinions are formed as well as the reach of these opinions have increased. The changes in the way moral sentiments are roused and formed have not just been quantitative, however: qualitative changes have taken place as well, in two major respects. First, due to the new media, our moral experiences are often very intense. We no longer simply read a text or view prints; we now receive highly powerful audiovisual impressions. The modern media put us eye to eye, as it were, with events that evoke a moral reaction. The annual World Press Photo contest is

8 Hoekstra 2005, p. 56; Houkes 2009, p. 70-71.

9 Abraham Kuyper wanted the distance between theory and practice to be as small as possible. Appealing to the *Epistles to the Roman*, verse 12, he advocated social reform based on Christianity. With the foundation of the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) in 1878, Kuyper created a new kind of politics. According to Hanneke Hoekstra, this first political party in the Netherlands was founded on a form of moral mobilisation, with the Biblical image of the wide and narrow road stimulating the activism of the lesser folk. The amalgamation of religious and political imagination provided a new impetus to the heart of the Dutch nation. This partly contributed to a reversal in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. While the liberal elite continued to think along 'rational' lines for a long time, after 1870 public speech was ever more often characterised by social involvement and compassion (Hoekstra 2005, p. 18, 61-65, 76, 127).

10 Hoekstra 2005, p. 186-187.

one illustration of this. Second, shocking events penetrate the most varied milieus, which sometimes results in a fierce clash of moral sentiments. The global commotion caused by several cartoons of the prophet Mohammed is a good example of this. Indeed, moral imagination is no longer the exclusive domain of poets and clergymen who expound their views on good and evil. Instead, it has become a domain in which the most diverse points of view are voiced, in which a strong dynamic is unfolding and in which millions of citizens are involved. The cases we deal with in this chapter represent only a few examples of this expanding moral imagination.

Before we start our discussion, we must say a few words about the status of the material we have studied. In this chapter, we will analyse two forms of so-called popular culture in which moral reflections play a role: a collection of young adult books usually labelled 'fantasy', and a number of existential television series. In our opinion, fantasy literature as well as the existential television series demonstrate the importance of 'big stories'. As is well known, Jean-François Lyotard postulated in 1979 that big stories had become obsolete and that the institutions that had always used such stories to further their ends – churches, political parties, elites, etc. – had lost their relevance for society.¹¹ This view grew even stronger after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, with many academics believing that only 'little' or individual stories are left.¹² We would like to amend this view by focusing on fantasy youth literature as well as widely broadcasted television series. These examples of popular culture demonstrate, in our opinion, the production, circulation and consumption of big stories in modern society. Together, they constitute a modern mythology as defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Yvette Biró and Wendy Doniger.¹³ For these authors, mythology refers to the entire collection of stories people exchange with one

11 Lyotard 1987, p. 25-29, 95-105.

12 One could object that philosophical stories (which post-modernism considers outdated) differ strongly from the everyday stories circulating in the media. Having said this, the distinction between philosophy and everyday life is not as sharp as people often think. First, in the course of time, philosophical notions penetrate everyday life. Second, philosophical views often rest on everyday assumptions that are left implicit. Partly because of this, we believe that the worlds of fantasy books and television series are also philosophically relevant.

13 Based on his research on the non-Western myth in the 1950s and 1960s, Lévi-Strauss formulated a theory on how the human mind functions in this. Roland Barthes elaborated on this theory in *Mythologies* (1957) and applied it to modern society. The religious studies scholar Wendy Doniger continued this line of research with her publication *The Implied Spider* (1998), but amended it slightly. Already in the early 1980s, Yvette Biró referred to the mythological potential of film in *Profane Mythology. The Savage Mind of the Cinema* (1982). She stressed that film does not just reflect reality but also shapes it, both in a factual and in a mental sense.

another: stories that are based on shared life experiences and that are used to reflect on the problems that challenge society.¹⁴ Lévi-Strauss and others do not concern themselves with unravelling or demystifying ‘inaccurate accounts’. They consider the myth first and foremost as a shared story that enables people to relate in a stylised manner to the things that (consciously or unconsciously) occupy their minds.¹⁵

After a short review of the status of fantasy novels (section 1), we discuss three themes that are often encountered in these books: the existence of parallel worlds (section 2); the ambiguity of human relationships (section 3); and the discovery of an own identity (section 4). We then raise the question of what status should be assigned to existential television series (section 5), after which we discuss the content and style of the hospital drama (sections 6 and 7). We also reflect on the content and style of police series (sections 8 and 9). We end the chapter with some concluding remarks (section 10).

1 The status of fantasy novels

Everyone knows that literature consists for the most part of fiction. Even if a book or novel is based on ‘real events’, its story is set in an imaginary world, which readers occupy for the duration of their reading the book. This also goes for a special genre of literature that we discuss here, one that is called ‘fantasy’.

One of the first people to conduct a scientific study into the nature of the fantastic was Tzvetan Todorov in *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, which was first published in 1970 and translated into English three years later under the title *The Fantastic*. According to Todorov, the genre of the fantastic implies that ‘the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as the world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described’ avoiding the use of allegorical interpretations.¹⁶ Although almost all later publications on this topic refer to Todorov, his work has also generated some debate. One of the points on which a certain consensus has been reached is the idea that, in the fantasy genre, the imagination is given a dual shape. According to Klingberg and Haas, in essence it concerns texts that unite two worlds: a

14 Lévi-Strauss 1978a, 1978b, 1979 and 1980 as well as Lemaire 2008.

15 De Mare 1990a; Raatgever 1990.

16 Todorov 1975, p. 33.

realistically described, everyday world and an irrational and mysterious world where highly unusual events occur.¹⁷ One characteristic of these children's books is that the 'mysterious' or 'fabulous' enters normal reality – something that makes them suspenseful.

Opinions differ, however, on the significance of this element of suspense. Authors such as Egoff and Swinfen believe that the serious fantasy novel brings a hidden dimension of human experience to the surface. They mention an important difference with the realistic novel, namely, that by means of the imagination and unconscious processes the human mind can dissociate itself from everyday reality and its limitations. This gives fantasy authors more room to develop their own moral vision, their own temporal structure and their own political and social order. However, this freedom does not mean that fantasy authors do not acknowledge reality. The fundamental value of fantasy novels is precisely that they comment on reality by exploring the moral, philosophical and other dilemmas that occur in reality. Sheila Egoff elaborates on this as follows: 'The purpose of fantasy is not to escape reality but to illuminate it: to transport us to a world different from the real world, yet to demonstrate certain immutable truths that persist even there – and in every possible world.'¹⁸ Jack Zipes expresses the same idea, stating that fantasy – irrespective of whether it is high-quality, cheap, pornographic, popular or sentimental – should always be interpreted as a symbolic extension of, or a symbolic commentary on, reality. In his view, fantasy is about creating a symbolic world in which personal and social experiences are put to the test. This is often done by looking back or even referring to earlier literary works that have shaped our experience. It is precisely by calling into being another world that the fantasy novel allows us to regard our own world and its conventions from a distance. The irony is that we can understand our own world better or even change it because literature gives us access to a different world of experience.¹⁹

This raises the question of why stories with such features are so appealing to young readers. It is due to their content or is it mainly the literary form that attracts their interest? One author who subscribes to the latter view is Caroline Hunt. According to Hunt, the common denominator of all forms of present-day fiction appreciated by young readers is that the stories are set in an alternative world. Certain works, such as Tolkien's trilogy, are of

17 Haas & Klingberg 1984, p. 269; see also Hunt & Millicent 2003.

18 Cited in Zipes 1985, p. 188-189.

19 Zipes 1985, p. 189.

the highest literary level; many others, however, are not. Some books are about enchanted characters that live in a fairy-tale world; others are about ordinary pupils at a secondary school where nothing ever happens. What these works have in common and why they appeal so much to adolescents has nothing to do with the characters, the characters' extraordinary or ordinary experiences, or other elements pertaining to content. The popularity of these stories can be explained first and foremost by the centrality of form and pattern. Hunt is quite firm in her opinion on this: 'At a time of life when one's own path is anything but clear, in a country which has virtually lost its rural roots and its traditional social structure, in a century seemingly marked by the ever-increasing role of randomness, what could be more appealing to them than pattern, direction – in short, that the individual, even the adolescent, can impose some measure of control over existence?'²⁰

The above makes clear that, when it comes to fantasy, we are dealing with a special branch of literature in which the imagination plays a prominent role. Also, it is a genre that concerns itself with the development of one's moral sensitivity. To clarify this point, in this chapter we present our study of a corpus of 26 books. These books were written by seven different authors and were all available to Dutch young readers in the period 2008-2010.²¹ The following works will be discussed in particular: *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, which is a series comprising seven titles;²² *Torenhoog en mijlen breed* by the Dutch author Tonke Dragt;²³ *The Brothers Lionheart* by the Swedish author Astrid Lindgren;²⁴ *The Neverending Story* by the German author Michael Ende;²⁵ the famous *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, which comprises seven titles;²⁶ *The Northern Lights Trilogy* by Philip Pullman (three titles);²⁷ and the *Artemis Fowl* series by Eoin Colfer, which comprises six titles.²⁸ The works of the first four authors are now regarded as classics; the other titles are more recent and have all been published in the past decade. Because our total corpus comprises some 7,500 pages, we cannot possibly do

20 Hunt 1987, p. 8.

21 To compile this corpus, we applied the following criteria: a) the books chosen have been reviewed by literary critics and in scientific journals; b) they are popular and widely read; c) we wanted to attain a balance between relatively recent titles and classics that are still available in the bookstore.

22 Lewis 2009.

23 Dragt 2001.

24 Lindgren 2009.

25 Ende 1999.

26 Rowling 1998, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2003, 2005 and 2007.

27 Pullman 2009.

28 Colfer 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009.

justice to the wealth of the material we have studied. We therefore confine ourselves to highlighting three dimensions that are relevant to almost all of the novels mentioned and that illustrates the way in which these works articulate a moral sensitivity. First, there is an *imaginary dimension*, which not only concerns the question of what the exact nature of the strange or fictive world is but also what its relationship is with the everyday world. Second, there is a *relational dimension*, which focuses on the relationships between the characters in the stories and the conflicts they must resolve. Third, there is a *moral dimension*, which touches on the way in which the characters act and what values play a role. In our opinion, the combination of these dimensions reflects what is characteristic of the fantasy genre: this is exactly where its pedagogical value lies.²⁹ Although these books are no doubt read because they are so amusing or exciting, they do contribute to the moral development of young adults.

2 Two (or more) imaginary worlds

Although fantasy novels deal with the most wide-ranging subjects, certain themes seem to be absolute favourites. We can mention the following: a) the juxtaposition of different worlds; b) travelling to another place or a different time zone; c) the contrast between light and dark; d) a special role for technical devices; and e) the protagonist's journey to the inner self. Below, we briefly explain how these themes come to the fore in the corpus we studied.

The stories of C.S. Lewis are set in two worlds. On the one hand, we have early twentieth-century London, where the main characters lead their daily lives; during the Second World War, they reside in the English countryside. On the other hand, there is Narnia: a 'fictive world' where many miraculous and dangerous events take place. The main characters regularly travel back and forth between these two worlds, with a wardrobe acting as their entrance and exit. An important point in these stories is that time behaves differently in the two different worlds. The characters can have a range of

29 This view rests mainly on Rita Ghesquière's study of the Harry Potter series. She distinguishes the following layers of meaning in these stories: 1) the level of worlds, or the way in which the different worlds are described; 2) the psychological level, or the way in which the characters and actions of the main characters are typified; 3) the sociological level, or the way in which the fictive world functions as a mirror of the real world; and 4) the ethical-religious level, or the moral values that are promoted in the story, in particular by the main characters (Ghesquière 2009).

experiences in Narnia, while only one day passes in the real world; however, one single year in England can also correspond to a thousand years in Narnia.

The story of *Torenhoog en mijlen breed* is also set in two different worlds. The protagonist travels to the planet Venus, which is still covered in woods, whereas Earth was deforested long ago. As it turns out, there are more differences between Venus and Earth. On Venus, people are afraid of nature, whereas on Earth people rule over nature. Although the main story is unmistakably about space travel, such travel involves more than a simple movement through space and time. In essence, the protagonist is on a journey to his inner being: at the end of the story, the people on Venus discover that their fear of nature resides deep within themselves.

Likewise, most of the story of *The Brothers Lionheart* takes place in a strange world. The contrast with the ordinary world is only apparent at the beginning of the book, when the main characters enter the fictive world of Nangijala by dying (one of them jumps from a burning building and the other succumbs to a disease). After another lethal jump at the end of the story, they end up in the equally fictive world of Nangilima. It turns out that there are certain differences and similarities between the fictive world and the real world. At first glance, Nangijala seems like paradise. However, on closer inspection, it turns out that there is also a contrast between light and dark in Nangijala: in Cherry Valley, inhabitants lead happy lives, whereas in the Thorn Rose Valley people suffer under the yoke of an evil power. As we can see, the main characters' journey is not just through space, it also has a mental and moral purport.

Although *The Neverending Story* is set in two different worlds as well, the relationship between these worlds cannot be reduced to a simple contrast. There are differences between the protagonist's daily life, where he is being bullied, and Fantasia, where he is a hero. At the same time, these two worlds mutually influence each other, with the story itself serving as the main link. Certain characters in Fantasia lure the protagonist away from his daily life, so that he ends up in the fictive world. Conversely, his adventures in the fictive domain cause him to change in daily life. Although the difference between both worlds remains clear (a different font is used for each world), the question does arise what the exact meaning is of all that is happening. Towards the end of the story, the protagonist's travels culminate in him discovering what his deepest wishes are.

In the *Harry Potter* series, most action takes place in a fictive world. The real world is only referred to at the beginning of the stories, when Harry's train departs for Hogwarts from the mysterious platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. Hogwarts is a world of aspiring wizards that differs in many respects from the ordinary

human world. At the same time, this fictive world is highly realistic, not just because of its detailed description but also because of the events that take place in the protagonist's life. Harry Potter has to brave all kinds of external dangers (Voldemort, malicious peers, bad teachers, etc.), but he also has to learn how to master the evil powers in himself. Although his travels seem to be movements through physical space and time (quidditch, a flying dragon, diving to the bottom of the sea and so forth), they are actually about moving through a domain that is morally loaded (loyalty versus betrayal) or existentially significant (fear versus courage).

In *The Northern Lights Trilogy*, the interplay between diverse worlds is even more complex. The idea that there are only two worlds is dismissed here as a church dogma. From the experiences of the main characters, we learn that there are several parallel realities that you can open up with a cunning knife if the circumstances are right. Moreover, the most bizarre creatures live in these worlds, and peculiar instruments are used. One of the most intriguing facts is that sometimes the main characters turn out to be instruments themselves.

Lastly, the stories of *Artemis Fowl* do not revolve around separate worlds but rather the continuous mixing of the 'normal world' (with well-known locations such as Russia, Germany or America) with an 'enchanted world' peopled with elves and kobolds. Although the protagonist travels back and forth between the two domains, it does not do him any good, because his memory is erased every time he leaves the enchanted world. This is compensated for by his knack for computers and other technical equipment in the real world. In the end, in this series, too, the main theme is the protagonist's confrontation with his own self.

As shown above, in all of these novels the presence of several worlds has a dual function: it ensures that the main characters travel back and forth between different domains and experience many adventures on the way. At the same time, the different worlds highlight certain mental and existential questions that the protagonist is struggling with. In fact, travelling through space and time is used as a metaphor for the quest for one's own destiny – a quest that is also relevant to young readers' real lives. This is probably one of the reasons why this genre captivates the imagination of so many young people.

3 Personal relationships

A second appeal of these books lies in the fact that they deal with human relationships. Themes that regularly occur are the following: a) building and maintaining friendships; b) romantic relationships (sexually tinged or not); c) trusting each other; d) being responsible for another person; and

e) making choices or difficult decisions. We discuss a number of books in our corpus in which these themes can be seen.

The themes of friendship and love occur in all of the stories. Friendships are formed and broken, just as in the real world. A special feature of the alternative worlds is, however, that friendships are essential for the protagonist's survival. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Peter, Edmund, Susan and Lucy already have a close bond because they are brothers and sisters. Their relationship grows even closer during all the adventures they have in Narnia. The fact that only they know about Narnia and the rest of the real world does not contribute to their intimacy. After all, they share a secret.

In the *Harry Potter* series, friendships are crucial as well. From the moment Harry goes to Hogwarts, he is friends with Ron Weasley. They are assigned to the same house of Gryffindor. There they meet Hermione, a rather precocious and bossy girl, with whom they soon form a close trio. This means they spend a lot of time together, help each other with their homework and defend each other if children from another house (such as the awful Draco Malfoy) is pestering one of them. As the series progresses, their friendship is increasingly put to the test. From time to time, suspicion, disappointment and rivalry drive the trio apart. Ron sometimes has a problem with Harry's status of hero, while Harry himself seeks solitude or breaks off all contact. Harry does not really find love, at least not at his uncle and aunt's, with whom he came to live after his parents' death. He regularly thinks of his parents and sometimes thinks he can see them. When he feels amazed about these visions, Dumbledore asks him the following question:

You think the dead we love ever truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself plainly when you have need of him.³⁰

In *The Northern Lights Trilogy*, it is Lyra and Will who form a close friendship. Their friendship is so special because they do not feel the need to pretend to each other. When they decide to go to the world of the dead, Lyra shows Will something she meant to hide from others, namely, that she is afraid of what is to come. Will realises that she would not admit this to other people. In the course of the story, their friendship develops into a real love relationship.

In *Artemis Fowl*, the protagonist is head and shoulders above the rest when it comes to inventiveness and cleverness, but he would not be able to survive his adventures if he did not cooperate with Butler and Holly Short.

30 *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, p. 321.

Besides love and friendship, trust is an important theme in this series. If you cannot trust your friends, who *can* you trust? A similar question presents itself to Jonathan and Scorpan in *The Brothers Lionheart* when they discover there is a traitor in the Cherry Valley. As it turns out, it is someone from whom they never would have expected such deceitful behaviour. Although this incident damages the trust the brothers have in 'thy neighbours', it does strengthen their trust in each other.

Also, the challenges that the characters face require substantial courage and stamina. These are not innate qualities but ones that have to be developed: the characters in the novels have to learn how to deal with fear. In *The Brothers Lionheart*, Scorpan sometimes surprises us by showing courage when he is actually scared and would rather run away. When his brother sets off on a journey to complete a difficult task and Scorpan dreams that he hears him call for help, he feels that he has to act. He is able to do that when he remembers what his brother used to say to him: that you sometimes have to do something dangerous in order to be a genuine human being. To sum up, these novels explore the many ambivalences of interpersonal relationships. The main characters frequently wrestle with the question of whether they belong to a group or should follow their own course, whether they must become friends with or break up with someone, and whether they should obey or reject those in authority. These are all questions that also play a role in the phase of life that the readers of fantasy are going through, questions that these readers also need to answer outside the scope of the book.

4 Morality and personal development

The third dimension that is frequently encountered in fantasy novels has to do with moral questions. More specifically, the following themes are often featured in these stories: a) combatting evil; b) seeking justice; c) defending another person; d) offering consolation to a fellow human being; and e) risking or even sacrificing your life for a good cause. We clarify this with a number of examples.

One of the most striking characteristics of fantasy stories is that they nearly always involve a battle between good and evil. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, this is even the main theme of the book. In *The Chronicles*, evil takes on various shapes. In part one, it is embodied by the Witch Jadis, in part two by the White Witch, and in the other parts by yet other witches. At the same time, the battle against evil cannot be fought without help. This is

one of the functions of the lion Aslan. The lion is not just a symbol of what is good in general, he is also given a specific Christian value. This becomes clear when Aslan is tied to a Stone Table by the witch and her accomplices and is subsequently killed by them. Afterwards, he comes back to life again, to the surprise and joy of the main characters.

Questions about how to act morally are also addressed in the other books. On this point, Harry Potter is prepared to go very far indeed. Harry sees it as his duty to help every fellow human being in need. During the Tournament, when he is given orders to save a number of children from the bottom of the lake, he does not just confine himself to the children he has been assigned but tries to save as many as possible. The jury awards him extra points for his effort to bring back all the children safely, even though Harry has well exceeded the time limit he was given for the assignment.

In addition to acting unselfishly, the confrontation with evil is of the utmost importance. One could even say that the battle between good and evil is one of the main drives behind the entire *Harry Potter* series. However, we are not dealing with a simple contrast between black and white here. Evil is embodied by the character of Voldemort, who killed Harry's parents and is now after Harry himself. Harry soon discovers, however, that the dividing line between good and evil is a hazy one and that evil also exists beyond Voldemort – for instance, in Voldemort's accomplices, in trusted figures who fall under the spell of evil, and in himself. The realisation that evil resides in all of us is one of the most difficult discoveries Harry must make. This is one of the reasons why Dumbledore initially does not tell Harry much about his calling. Harry must arrive at a point where he makes his own choice and can assess the consequences of that choice. He must not only battle Voldemort, whose power is active in the heads and hearts of others, but also face his own dark side.

In *The Northern Lights Trilogy*, evil also comes in many different shapes and sizes. In part one, there are characters that lure children away and capture them: they make Lyra go north. Some people Lyra trusts later turn out to be traitors. In part two, we meet some people who are after Will's father. In part three, Lyra runs into danger herself because there are certain characters who want to steal her 'truth meter'.

As can be seen, several dimensions converge in these novels. An important aspect is how these different dimensions interact and together propel the protagonists towards adulthood. The protagonists learn to fend for themselves, make choices and take responsibility, but they also learn to be there for others, defend those who need defending, or simply provide comfort when needed. The awakening of their moral consciousness thus

forms part of their personal development. A major component of this process is conquering the fear of the unknown. This motif is explicitly featured in *Torenhoog en mijlen breed*. In this story, the fear of the unknown even becomes tangible in the sense that the earthlings on Venus retreat under a giant dome for fear of their natural surroundings, only venturing outside in vehicles or protective clothing. The computer decides what they can and what they cannot do. For instance, researchers first must photograph everything that looks like trees and then destroy these things; they must never forget that every animal creature on Venus is dangerous, and they must fly at a certain height and speed over the forests. The protagonist ignores this fear-induced attitude. His subsequent experiences in the woods are so pure and beautiful that he wants to return there. In response to the argument that the woods are extremely dangerous, he says: 'That is as may be. But dangers reside in yourself, not in the woods.'

Discovering and accepting yourself is also where *The Neverending Story* ends. The protagonist changes from a fat, fearful and lonely boy in the real world into a handsome young man in Fantasia, who is granted several wishes by the Childlike Empress to thank him for curing her. However, the wishes he makes culminate in a form of megalomania. In the end, though, he discovers that, in essence, he does not long for wisdom, strength or beauty but rather for the ability to love. He will cherish this ability for the rest of his life. As the above demonstrates, in many respects the genre of fantasy resembles the Bildungsroman or coming-of-age novel. The main characters go through a personal struggle; they conquer fear and doubt; they discover what really motivates them and, towards the end of the story, they accept who they are. The stories show that moral awareness is not a foregone conclusion but something that has to be acquired and that always raises doubts and uncertainty. Also, you need others to help you. It is just as miraculous as it is magnificent that other people's help tends to take the form of a... story.

5 The status of television series

In the following sections, we focus on two kinds of existential television series: the hospital drama and police series. Both genres exhibit all the traits of a modern mythology. For instance, most hospital dramas revolve around the question of what role medical care fulfils in modern existence. The increase in medical information – on television, on the Internet and in magazines – goes hand in hand with a growing number of medical soap

operas. This confirms what we describe elsewhere in this book, namely that modern man attaches great value to vitality and health.³¹ On the other hand, it also emphasises that the flood of medical knowledge has created new problems. Not all uncertainties can be taken away by more information or better procedures. At the point where medical information runs out, the hospital drama begins. As soon as medical skill reaches its limits, the imagining of sickness and health becomes relevant. The hospital drama reaches its full potential in particular when someone in the series is diagnosed with a fatal disease – such as cancer, AIDS or dementia – and the question arises how to deal with it. The medical soap opera generates an array of answers to this question, exploring all possible variants. Seen from this perspective, the thousands of hours of medical fiction do indeed form a mythology, by means of which we try to cope with the things happening to us in modern life. In fact, the hospital drama offers a glimpse into the feelings and sensitivities of modern man, into our considerations and expectations, our hopes and fears when it comes to physical integrity, and our ability or inability to deal with suffering and mortality. In this manner, the hospital drama constitutes a necessary complement to the advances in medical technology and emphasises the collective need to come to terms with the shortcomings of the modern age.³²

Likewise, the police series creates an imaginary world in which a variety of urgent questions are explored. We recognise a number of issues that can be found in the real world. Life in the big city, everyday violations of the law, confrontations between ethnic groups, diverse forms of theft, dark practices, criminal organisations, rape, murder and manslaughter – all this forms the basis for an endless variation in television stories. In contrast to the medical television series which revolves around the survival or demise of patients while the medical staff wrestles with personal and professional problems, in the police series both the lives of ordinary citizens and those of the police are at stake. It is no wonder that emotions sometimes run high in this genre – for instance, when police officers who are following their calling see their names tarnished, or when corrupt police disgrace the oath they once took, when their efforts and enthusiasm are thwarted by a bureaucratic organisation, or when someone dies in the battle against Evil. At the same time, the police series has far more to offer than just a two-dimensional reproduction of certain facts that are also discussed in the

31 See chapters 5 and 6.

32 See the different studies that have been published by the Dutch Foundation of Public Imagination, the IVMV foundation, www.ivmv.nl (De Mare 2009, 2011a, 2011b).

news. We know that many things go wrong in society and that the police are not always successful in their battle against crime. However, this is only one ingredient. Another important theme is the way in which we deal with these (mostly negative) facts and how, in spite of it all, we continue to *believe in a just society*. The latter is often expressed in a rather forceful manner: the use of violence, heroic acts and dangerous chases all underline the fact that we are dealing with extremely serious matters here. The public's idea of police work does not entail meeting targets or handing out fines but about cooperating in situations of acute danger and defending the democratic system of law and order.³³

In order to assess the true value of both types of existential television series, we must dismiss the idea that they may give a correct or a distorted view of real life.³⁴ We must dismiss the notion that this kind of fiction only exists because people crave for dreams, amusement, emotional spectacle or irrational fantasies. Doing so removes many of the objections that hospital and police professionals themselves raise against these genres. True, real-life nurses do not behave in an operating room as they do in *Grey's Anatomy*. It is also true that, in reality, very few people wake up miraculously and completely unharmed from a coma. And, granted, there are actors who, from the point of view of a therapist, do not portray a convincing client. Also, detectives cannot always solve a crime as quickly as is suggested in a television episode, and yes, real police work is often far less exciting.³⁵

33 De Mare 2013a, 2013b.

34 Recently, many (Anglo-Saxon) studies on television drama have been published. Although these studies provide plenty of information, their aim usually differs from the aim of this chapter. Most studies revolve around the question of how certain social problems in everyday life are correctly (or incorrectly) *represented* in television series. They try to demonstrate that the media are powerful, that this power is often misused, and that our communication systems are principally ideological in nature. As far as television drama itself is actually studied in these publications, it is primarily done to *illustrate* such social, ideological and political views. The authors are mainly interested in social and political mechanisms, such as the role of producers (production) or the attitude of audiences to television drama (reception). In our view, it is more fruitful (and a bigger challenge) to study television drama itself in order to understand how the television drama creates a moving imagination. It is not just the narrative developments or trials and tribulations of the protagonists that have to be studied but also the way in which the plot is organised by means of lighting, sound, music, framing, editing and so forth. See also King 2009, Bordwell & Thompson 2008, Plate 2008, Gibbs & Pye 2009, Plantinga 2009.

35 A few years ago, the question was raised whether medical soap operas truly reflect the reality of sickness and health. Discussing the television series *In Treatment* in 2009, Hans Beerekamp wrote that, although he did find the series 'highly addictive', it did not 'truly reflect any real existing therapeutic practice' and that it contained 'artificial dialogues'. When, in the summer of 2010, a Dutch version of this series was produced in the Netherlands, similar opinions were

But this is not what fiction is about. Those who only see the factual aspects concerning the doctor and the patient, a coma and an operating room, cops and thieves, take a rather narrow view of human reality. Instead of understanding television drama in terms of representation and communication, as is often done by media and cultural studies, we focus on imagination and the way it transforms our involvement in the world.³⁶ In other words, we must interpret the existential television drama as an aspect of our mental reality, a world that does not coincide entirely with our physical existence. What concerns us here is the reality of the imagination that many people share.

It is this shared fascination, too, that explains why the television series mentioned above attract such broad audiences. We know that, in the Netherlands, this kind of drama is watched by a staggering amount of viewers. While the Dutch version of *In Treatment* attracted on average 400,000 viewers, *Medisch Centrum West* had 3 to 4.5 million viewers, which is quite a lot given a population of 16 million Dutch citizens. Moreover, the popularity of this kind of drama is not new. Ever since the 1960s, numerous hospital series have been produced, all of which have found a wide and loyal audience. Examples are *Dr Kildare*, *St. Elsewhere* and *ER*. Police series are also consumed on a large scale. The public fascination with this genre even exceeds that of the hospital drama series. In the past few years, Dutch viewers could choose among twelve medical soap opera episodes on average per week, and five times as many police series – some 60 episodes per week. One episode of the American *CSI* draws roughly 1.2 million viewers in the Netherlands. In 2007, British series such as *A Touch of Frost* and the *Inspector Lynley Mysteries* drew on average 1 million and 700,000 viewers respectively.³⁷ The audience for Dutch police series such as *Baantjer* and *Flikken Maastricht* exceeds this number, reaching 2 and 1.6 million viewers respectively.³⁸ If we add the

voiced (Beerekamp 2009, Mispelblom Beyer 2010, Ali 2010, Brunt 2010, Drayer 2010, Van der Kooi 2010).

36 Our study on television series as audio-visual system is based on the *theory of imagination*. This theory describes two axes. The first is the *axis of fiction*, related to the question of how the interplay of formal conventions creates a separate imaginary world. The second is the *axis of transformation*, which is related to the question of how the imaginary world mobilises the audience's imagination. Both perspectives are needed to understand how fiction functions in a more general sense. This theory allows us to abandon the *theory of representation*, i.e. the idea that films and television series would somehow be a representation of reality and that film and television series should primarily be understood in terms of social communication. A more thorough discussion of this theoretical debate can be found in De Mare 2012a, p. 315-321.

37 De Heer 2007; De Slover & Sahadat 2008.

38 For an analysis of ratings and groups of viewers, we refer to De Mare 2012a, p. 313-315.

sales of DVD box sets and the people who watch such series via the Internet (HBO, Netflix and such), the number of viewers is even higher. In view of this abundance of material, we confine our analysis here to a few typical cases. We focus on a few episodes of two hospital dramas and two police series that have been broadcast on Dutch television in the last decade, namely: 1) *ER*; 2) *Grey's Anatomy*; 3) *NYPD Blue*; and 4) *The District*.

Just as in the case of fantasy fiction, different dimensions play a role in these television series. First, there is a *narrative dimension*, which not only concerns the organisation of several storylines in a specific episode but also their relationship within the season as a whole. Characters are crucial, both as a point of (emotional) identification and as anchors of the plot as well as narrative structure. The stereotype doesn't represent social reality, as is often believed. In fact, it represents an economic set of qualities, used in television series to play with our assumptions and to change storylines. Second, there is the *moral dimension*, which focuses on ethical dilemmas that are obvious in situations of illness and death, crime and murder. Besides the *narrative* and *moral* dimension, we focus our analysis on certain aspects of the *filmic* dimension. We concentrate in particular on *mise-en-scène*, the use of colour and light, and facial expressions. All these features are crucial for the way in which the imagination is invoked and made to work.³⁹ In our opinion, the combination of these three dimensions determine what is characteristic of existential television drama. Audio-visual fiction has the power to transform the human mind, given a) the internal *plausibility* of the imaginary world; b) the *credibility* of the story compared to the everyday world; and c) the capacity to organise *emotional involvement* by creating 'empathic moments'. This is exactly where its value for modern society lies. Although these television series are no doubt watched because they are amusing or exciting, they do offer a shared moral context for adults.

6 Visual qualities of the hospital drama

Let us begin with an example from the pilot of *ER*, which was broadcast in 1994 (Figures 1.1 to 1.5). The scene in question lasts five minutes, which

39 Confining the discussion to the American series mentioned in this chapter, our insights stem from a broader study in which we also pointed out interesting differences between American and Dutch television series. Although moral themes as such were similar, we witnessed often huge differences in the intensity of the moral sentiments that are evoked. For a more extensive discussion of the comparison, see De Mare 2012a.

may seem short. But given the fact that the contact between the doctor and the patient lasts on average one-and-a-half minutes in this series, it is a relatively long scene. Stated differently, the scene takes its time, and for good reason, too. The scene is about breaking the bad news to a patient. During the five minutes that it lasts, the doctor and the patient exchange numerous significant looks. Several symptoms and medical facts are mentioned, and diverse interpretations of this information are discussed as are the likely consequences.

The ill-fated man is forty years old, married and a father of three, someone who has to meet the payments for two mortgages and is full of plans for the future. But he has been a chain smoker for years, and there is a spot on his lung. The patient fears the worst and forces the specialist to arrive at a diagnosis. This is at the core of their dialogue: the patient weighs his own interpretations and tries to persuade the doctor to come to a definitive judgement. The man uses the conversation to test and exclude certain possible syndromes. The specialist acts professionally: she refuses to commit to a diagnosis, because there is not enough hard evidence. Still, experience has taught her to suspect something on the basis of what the lung photo has shown her. Halfway through the scene, the patient starts to realise that he may have to face the prospect of dying. There are long pauses in the conversation; there is despair and sorrow. Other emotions rise to the surface as well: the longing to do, in the time that is left, what he and his wife always intended to do, namely, go on holiday to Nassau. And there is black humour: the man realises that he does not have to go through the difficult process of giving up smoking. The fiction overwhelms us and makes us realise what it must be like to receive such bad news. Who knows, maybe we are being prepared at a subconscious level for similar emotions should we ourselves be confronted with such a fate.

The challenge of a scholarly analysis of such a scene lies not only in registering the feelings it arouses but also, even more so, in the attempt to understand how medical fiction actually works. To this end, we must establish a relationship between what happens at the manifest level of narrative action and all kinds of audio-visual aspects that, at first sight, seem of secondary importance. The function of those aspects should not be underestimated. They imperceptibly strengthen the impact of what is being said. All these elements work together in this scene comprising more than 40 shots: there is light and shadow passing over the actors' faces, there is rain pouring down the window, there are soft shades that contrast with the harsh X-ray and dusky space of the hospital. Piano music announces the end of the scene after it has reached its climax. Exactly by combining

all these elements, the scene shows what the moral core of existential fiction is all about: it conjures up an existential world that transcends this specific doctor and patient – in this case by imagining an approaching death, together with a feeling of compassion that is hinted at. In this manner, we see, halfway through the 88-minute pilot of *ER*, the first moment of empathy emerging.⁴⁰

7 Moments of empathy

How are such moments of empathy actually created? The moral appeal they make to the viewer depends partly on the narrative: as a rule, such moments take place shortly before or after a dramatic event. However, because it concerns film, a dramatic turn of events also has to meet certain visual requirements. To clarify this point, we discuss four visual codes: *mise-en-scène*, lighting, use of colour, and facial expressions.

The first visual code concerns *mise-en-scène*.⁴¹ The hospital drama can be recognised in an instant, by its setting and the props used. A standard setting is the infirmary, but it can also be the operating room – a space that most people have never personally experienced. Restricting ourselves to American hospital dramas, we see that the settings are in general soberly arranged. Everything is balanced: the objects within the frame have been carefully selected and are integrated into a whole. Images are made up of colours and surfaces that match. Utilitarian objects, textiles, coloured walls – whatever is in the scene is part of an image-oriented strategy.

The interplay of light and shadow forms an integral part of the overall composition in the American hospital drama. It is remarkable how often Venetian blinds are used (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). This visual device can be an aid for subtly emphasising an exchange of looks, an intense emotion, or underlining the complexity of a situation. By means of dark and light rays, the *mise-en-scène* can be modulated in a refined manner. Of course, these shades of dark and light are motivated by using everyday things such as an open door that lets in the light from the hallway, but their visual effect is powerful all the same. This nuanced light is an unsurpassed means of accentuating someone's pose, face or an action, stirring up certain feelings. On the whole, *mise-en-scène* in these hospital dramas comprises more than just a reference to a certain space; it also contributes to the visual

40 From minute 35.58 to minute 41.08.

41 Lauwaert 1983; Bordwell & Thompson 2008, p. 112-161.

design of the plot. In this way storylines are both emphasised and nuanced, counterbalanced or doubted. By doing this, American television series aim for an economical and balanced visual formation resulting in what could be called an 'enchanted imagination'.⁴²

Furthermore, these series tend to make substantial use of colour combinations, colour contrasts and saturated colours to call attention to something. Accent colours serve as cues ('Take note: something important is happening here'). If one watches closely, one can regularly see colours pop up and disappear again, underlining the drama of the moment or calling attention to the emotional weight of the dialogue. This does not mean that certain colours are assigned a specific meaning.⁴³ They simply contribute to making the passions visible, they help the viewers to imagine what inner motives are playing a role. In that sense, the colour spectrum serves as an explication of what is going on in the mind: it functions as a gauge to assess the emotional temperature of a scene, a cue of what is going on in or between certain characters. It prepares the viewer's brain for the dramatic, tragic or romantic turns in the story. In American series, it is not just the professional but also the personal register that is accompanied by such colour accents. In times of love or sorrow, during goodbyes or reunions, and at many other moments that involve emotion, all kinds of colours tend to pop up. Nothing much is said, but there is all the more to see (Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

Finally, facial expression and acting style are relevant for the way in which the professional characters are presented and how moral or narrative aspects of the hospital drama are intensified. This happens in particular at a moment of empathy when feelings are running high. In American hospital series the face serves as a landscape where emotions are shown in a controlled way, even when emotions reach a peak. The face is like a solid ground on which a limited range of elementary feelings is displayed. Anger, sorrow, disgust, joy, fear, loathing, love and lust – all these feelings are universally recognised because they correspond to particular biological differences in

42 In comparison to this, it turned out that the images of Dutch hospital series show a cluttered, unadorned abundance (Figures 2.1 and 2.2; see also the original research, De Mare 2012a, p. 307-348). This 'down-to-earth realism' is all the more striking if we remember that the art of creating carefully balanced images was first developed in the Dutch Golden Age. We are alluding to the so-called 'art of painting' here, as presented in the painting of domestic scenes as well as the treatises on painting in that period (see De Mare 2012b, p. 332-483). It has to be added that the Dutch police series we studied do not deviate that significantly from American police series (compare Figures 3.1 and 3.2).

43 De Mare 2012c, p. 455, footnote 5.

the facial muscles.⁴⁴ The hospital drama applies this knowledge. A minimal iconography is used, based on a limited number of fundamental expressions of inner life (Figures 4.7 and 4.8). The faces of many American actors remain subtle, measured and calm in times of great emotional turmoil (Figures 5.3 and 5.4).⁴⁵ In this manner, the face can become 'a battlefield of emotions' (Figures 7.1 and 7.2).⁴⁶

To gain further insight into how the moment of empathy works, we discuss a case of terminal illness. The scene occurs in the American series *Grey's Anatomy* and concerns the death of Mr. O'Mailley, father to George, one of the interns in the series. The father is a jovial and chubby man. Earlier on in the series, he collected George once to take him hunting with his brothers, so he is already known to us as a character. In episode 8 of the third season, Mr. O'Mailley's health suddenly starts to deteriorate, and he is admitted to the hospital where George works. In the course of four episodes, he undergoes a number of tests and an operation. It finally turns out that he has cancer with metastases all throughout his body. After the operation, he loses control of several bodily functions and the end of his life begins to draw near. A conversation follows in which the specialists explain the situation to George, his mother and his two brothers: the family now has to decide whether or not 'to pull the plug'. Remarkably, during this emotional moment the faces of George and his mum remain virtually motionless, apart from a single suggestive accent here and there. However, various other forms of movement occur during the scene: there are changes in colour (dark and light, yellow and red), and we see alternating grids of crossed lines, with both narrow and broad horizontal stripes. The emotionally charged moment is linked not so much to the characters as to the peripheral parts of the image.

Having been prepared by all these impressions, the viewer's heart can open itself and let itself be touched. Only after this emotional fine-tuning does the family take the decision to let the father die. This decision is not unexpected, and we can fully concur with it. A subsequent scene shows how the family, together with Miranda Bailey, gathers round the bed of the ailing husband and father. The scene has been framed in a conventional way: the beginning and end clearly take place in the same room (Figures

44 Ekman 2003.

45 There is a connection here with the classic view of the passions that we mentioned during our discussion of Jacob Cats' work, and also with the way passions were painted in early modern Europe, see De Mare 2012b, p. 366-367.

46 De Mare 1986, p. 48.

5.5 to 5.8). Colour and lighting have been carefully composed: a palette of soft pastels dominates. At the same time, a contrast has been applied by means of bright blue lights. This is a cue to what cannot be said out loud: the mother embraces her husband for the last time and the visual bond between the spouses remains intact for a moment by means of a glaring blue light. Silently they say goodbye. George makes a cautious gesture, his head surrounded by changing colours: grey-green, pastels, red and black. The scene ends in subdued colours.

The scene discussed shows emotional involvement: the characters want to ease the suffering, and they are full of sorrow at the passing away of a loved one. But the narrative itself is not enough to understand how the viewer's feelings of empathy arise as a matter of course. To stir up moral feelings like these, a certain register has to be opened. When it comes to television series, opening such a register is a highly sensory matter. Mainly visual and musical interventions help to establish an atmosphere in which death is not so much cognitively as affectively made imaginable.

8 Visual qualities of police series

To give an impression of the topics and themes that feature in police series, we begin once again with an example. The scene we discuss is from the first season of the American police series *The District*, which was broadcasted for several years on a Dutch public television channel. The central character in the series is Jack Mannion, a modern chief of police in Washington DC. Jack is a man who keeps his back straight and has a clear view of his calling: he regularly voices his vision in passionate speeches or by taking a firm stance, always focusing on his professional ideals. As the chief, he fulfils an exemplary role for his people. He points at strict boundaries, invests in their professional development and tells them to apply themselves to their noble task in a conscientious manner. In other words: he appeals to the imagination of his own corps and the imagination of the citizens of Washington. The scene below shows how this is done.

We are witnessing a speech that Mannion is delivering in the church of the Afro-American community (Figures 6.1 to 6.5). Mannion gives this speech because he has resolved to clamp down on crime in one of Washington's neighbourhoods, where a small group of Afro-American youths is disrupting community life with their alcohol abuse, drugs and threats. The problem is, of course, that the Afro-American community is less than inclined to welcome such police intervention. Mannion

decides – white as he is – to go over and explain to the community what he intends to do and what he hopes to achieve. He makes a speech in the local church, where the mood is initially sceptical if not hostile. The reasons for this attitude are clear. This is not the first time that local inhabitants have witnessed such demonstrations of power. They have little sympathy for a chief of police who has come to tell them that he will set the record straight this time. Halfway through Mannion's speech, however, the mood suddenly changes. A feeling of mutual solidarity arises; people open themselves up to the policeman's message, and it ends with them having faith in his approach. Everyone now realises that this chief of police is not just looking after his own interests but has the common interest of all Washington's citizens at heart. Those present are swept along in a shared involvement in the public interest and – for the first time in years – they can look beyond the horizon of the depressing situation they are in. This elevated mood reaches its peak when Mannion ends his speech by reading a fragment from the Bible. But the change in atmosphere in the church is, in fact, the result of something else. Let us try and see exactly how this happens.

The fragment in question lasts some five minutes in all. At first glance, the scene seems to evolve naturally, although in reality it comprises 49 shots that subtly guide the viewer's attention. Indeed, the scene has been put together in a highly effective way, inviting the viewers to truly experiencing the change of mood in the church. The entire process relies heavily on framing and editing. The imagination is stirred into action by all manner of things that, at first glance, do not really contribute to the story, but which colour the scene at decisive moments, making its impact all the greater. The story itself is surprisingly simple. Chief of police Mannion addresses the Afro-American community because they feel let down by the authorities. Mannion even admits as much. He describes the people present as ordinary citizens: people who pay their taxes and who are right to expect the authorities to protect them from crime. This is exactly why Mannion wants to fight for them. The message of his speech is crystal clear, as are the gestures he uses to underline his words and his facial expression, which show that he really means business (Figure 6.3). The protagonist is presented as a highly driven professional, a man whose vision transcends everyday problems and who truly believes in the unifying forces that he hopes to elicit. However, it is not just the rhetorical build-up of his speech and his gestures that make the scene so powerful. This is mainly achieved by means of the visual register.

Apart from some 'establishing shots' that mark off the beginning and end, the scene consists of four basic shots, with variations in distance, angle, camera movement and colour balance. After editing, these shots form a variegated pattern. The setting is clear: we know what room we are in and the *mise-en-scène* is such that all elements in the frame prepare for and support the speech. For instance, there is a woman dressed in red who is clearly visible at a crucial moment in the scene. In reality, we could have spotted her a few seconds earlier: she was a member of the audience who witnessed Mannion's arrival. Our attention is drawn – no doubt by the red accent – to something that is about to happen, even though we may not know exactly what this will be. When Mannion submits a personal question to his audience (and shows his feelings), he is given a more central position in the frame. Up to that moment, we have seen him moving rhythmically from left to right. Towards the end of the scene a similar symmetry can be seen, although this time it is the background colours that are changing, at Mannion's left and right. They shift from red/yellow via red into yellow/red. This change is motivated by the story, of course: Mannion is moving through the room. At the same time, the change in colour calls our attention to the fact that a shift is taking place at the emotional level. In the final part of the scene, the music will add to this. Everything is geared towards making the chief of police appear convincing – even to those who do not like Mannion as a person.⁴⁷ As a compassionate person of authority, he can lift the Afro-American community (and the viewer) far above the situation at hand. Once the three registers – the narrative, moral and filmic register – converge and reinforce each other, the moment of empathy is a fact. Once again, we see that the emotional release takes place towards the end of the episode, at the moment that the storylines reach their completion, after which the music takes over.

9 The rule of law and self-sacrifice

If we move from this one case to a more general level, we note that every police series forms its own imaginary world based on a number of narrative

47 The difference between primary and secondary cinematographic identification plays a role in this (Bergala 1991, 1992). Even those viewers who do not find Mannion very likeable (because he is too authoritarian, too smug, etc.), and thus fail to *emotionally* identify with him, have gone through the primary cinematographic identification phase in which the camera helped us to recognise several shots as belonging to a person called Mannion. In other words, the editing of the 49 shots make Mannion an almost 'unavoidable' character to the viewers.

threads. Just like the hospital drama, the police series presents a range of existential questions and ethical dilemmas in a stylised manner. Often, certain themes are featured that we recognise from current events. It allows for an endless variation of the issues at stake, although in essence the police series always revolves around breaking the law. The main point is to restore public order, protect the rule of law, and guarantee people's safety. This perspective renders meaning to over-familiar elements such as using violence, the physical action undertaken by the characters, and chasing after criminals. In principle, the same goes for explosions, collapsing buildings and car crashes. It is not uncommon for such motifs to be condemned on moral grounds. Critics often say there are 'too many' violent scenes in police series and that such harsh action need not be taken. But what yardsticks do critics apply when they make such comments? From the perspective of the theory of imagination, one could argue that these 'excesses' are an indication of the enormous efforts the police must make (often at their own peril) to maintain the Law. Defending the rule of law is, in principle, an endless task that demands great sacrifices. This is an important difference from the hospital series. While doctors and nurses try to promote the well-being of others, policemen and policewomen operate on the seamier, dark side of life. They work in an imaginary world that reminds us of the film noir: many scenes take place in the dead of night, with glistening tarmac, dubious practices, criminals on the run, and steadfast and ruthless detectives.

What can we say in this respect about the use of colour? Although the presence of certain colours is often motivated by the setting, they do play a role of their own. They also contribute to the emotional value of a scene. Colours can suggest that the characters are experiencing conflicting feelings, or they can show at a single glance the way their moods differ. Points of light can pop up to draw our attention – red, white, yellow, green or blue – although this never takes place in a random way. The colours accentuate tensions, highlight sensitivities and emphasise certain passions. In this way, a specific atmosphere is created that unconsciously influences the way viewers assess and evaluate a scene (Figures 4.5 and 4.6). To discover how this works, one has to watch a scene several times over: only then can one establish how the different ingredients (shapes, colours, gestures, words, lighting, frame, sound, etc.) combine and reinforce each other. Such an analysis is nearly impossible when watching a scene for the very first time: you are simply overwhelmed by the many impressions that hit you, which automatically stir up certain associations. *Mise-en-scène* is crucial here because it acts on various levels. A well-thought-out *mise-en-scène* produces

an image that not only meets the requirements of (internal) plausibility and (external) credibility but also evokes a certain mood or a feeling of being involved.

If such visual elements are skillfully combined with a dramatic turn in the plot, the police series also shows its moments of empathy (Figures 8.1 to 8.4). As an example, we discuss the seventh episode of the first season of *NYPD Blue*. This episode revolves around a Polish couple that have not lived in New York for very long. They report that their little boy Rudy has gone missing. After doing the rounds in the local neighbourhood, with Andy Sipowicz talking to passers-by and showing them the boy's picture, a case is reported at the police station. A boy has been found murdered: the body is lying in the bushes near the apartment building where the Polish couple live. The detectives Kelly and Sipowicz visit the parents, asking them to help with the identification. The mother stays at home, and the father leaves with the police officers. Initially, the father is still hopeful (Figures 8.5 to 8.8): no doubt there are other little boys who go missing in such a big city. Just before the identification of the body is to take place, we see the father desperately lonely and seeking support, framed by Kelly and Sipowicz, who give him time to prepare himself. Behind the blinds lies his future – perhaps. A moving scene follows: the father finally decides to take a look. He puts his hand on the glass and recognises his child, although the child itself does not appear in view. Instead, we see the father reaching out to the son who will forever remain beyond reach. Kelly and Sipowicz allow the father all the time he needs: they understand the inexpressibility of his sorrow. They keep at a distance but their faces show that they can imagine what the father must be going through, and they are prepared to share the father's sorrow if he should need such support. It is a scene in which virtually nothing happens but, at the same time, it is a scene that is about everything, and in which emotions are given free rein.

How is such an empathic moment settled from a narrative point of view, and how is it made bearable? To begin with, it does not take long before the perpetrator is caught. This man has not just murdered the child but has abused him as well. When Sipowicz and the killer face each other in the interviewing room, this happens in a highly stylised manner. The appalling emotions must be curbed. Gradually it becomes clear what has happened. This takes the shape of a sort of visual reshuffle: subtle cues in Andy Sipowicz' face express a number of intense emotions such as controlled rage, infinite disgust, and a genuine thirst for revenge. At the same time, similar minimal facial cues are shown of his satisfaction when the murderer confesses: the man *will* be punished. The visual articulation reassures us

that the moral order, which had been disrupted so shockingly by the death of a child, is restored, at least symbolically. However, this is apparently not enough, because towards the end of the episode events take an unexpected turn. This happens when both detectives visit the boy's parents to tell them about the arrest. It turns out that, since Ruby's death, the mother has been standing out on the street opposite the apartment building. The father and the detectives now join her. The mother, who is surrounded by a green haze, points to the roof of the apartment building. She stretches out her arms and raises her eyes. At that precise spot, on the day Ruby died, she tells them, a pigeon appeared, wreathed by a halo of yellow light. The parents believe this is their child's soul and that he is doing well. The detectives also look up, to confirm that the parents are right.

In police series, cops as well as detectives are devoted to a just cause. They are the embodiment of basic ideals and values. Acting in the spirit of the law, they sometimes come in conflict with bureaucracy, because these practices often violate the rule of law they want to serve and protect.⁴⁸ As is the case with hospital drama, these stories appeal to the imagination, not only in terms of the plot, but also by audio-visual qualities. Together they evoke moments of empathy that cannot be articulated by reason alone.

10 Conclusions

In the previous chapter, it has been argued that moral sentiments play a prominent role in (different sectors of) modern professional life. Our conclusion in this chapter is that the same goes for the way in which many citizens spend their leisure time. Moral sentiments are, in any case, often addressed in popular forms of culture enjoyed by a large number of citizens. We have illustrated this by discussing two examples of popular culture: fantasy novels for young readers and existential television series for adults. Our main findings are the following.

First of all, we can regard these youth novels and existential television series as a form of modern mythology. They deal with imaginary events that reflect reality only indirectly. The mythological nature of fantasy novels is evident. These novels are often about a protagonist who moves from ordinary life to the fictive world, where he or she experiences the most wonderful adventures. In a similar manner, the television series

48 De Mare 2013a.

discussed are set in an imaginary world. These television series offer us stories about existential events – in terms of illness and death, safety and crime – where professional protagonists find ways to deal with these events. By regarding these popular culture products as a present-day form of mythology, we aimed to demonstrate that they refer to a body of shared stories that articulate social and moral concerns in a stylised manner. The popularity of hospital dramas, for instance, does not stem from the fact that they provide a clear picture of the medical profession in practice. It allows us a glimpse into the sensitivities of modern man, our hopes and fears when it comes to physical integrity, and our ability or inability to deal with suffering and death. By analogy, the police series always revolves around the question of how we can respond to violence or crime, and what is needed to restore law and order. Defending the rule of law is, basically, an endless battle that requires great sacrifices. The police series presents an imaginary world in which the moral and existential sides of this battle are at stake. In that sense, these novels and television series do what mythological stories have always done: they imagine the major challenges of our lives and the different ways of dealing with them (Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

Although fantasy novels and television series are both a form of public imagination, they employ different means. Fantasy novels mainly use a literary procedure. We have highlighted three elements of this process. First of all, the main characters travel to strange worlds where they undergo many adventures (imaginary dimension). An alternative plot is that they travel back and forth between different domains because they have to complete certain tasks. Those travels are often a metaphor for a personal quest in which the protagonist discovers the destination of his/her existence. Second, a great deal of attention is paid to interpersonal relationships (relational dimension). The characters learn how to build and maintain friendships, how to deal with those in authority, how to trust people who later betray that trust, and so on. By means of these themes, many ambiguities of human existence are explored, and certain models of behaviour can be tested. Third, the battle between good and evil often plays a prominent role in these stories (moral dimension). In the books we studied, this struggle was seldom in the form of a simple antithesis. Evil does not always originate in others; it can also reside in the protagonist. At the same time, it is clear that the battle can only be successfully fought if others help you. By combining these three dimensions, fantasy novels closely resemble the coming-of-age novel. The main characters enter into a fight with themselves, they have to conquer doubts and fear, they discover what

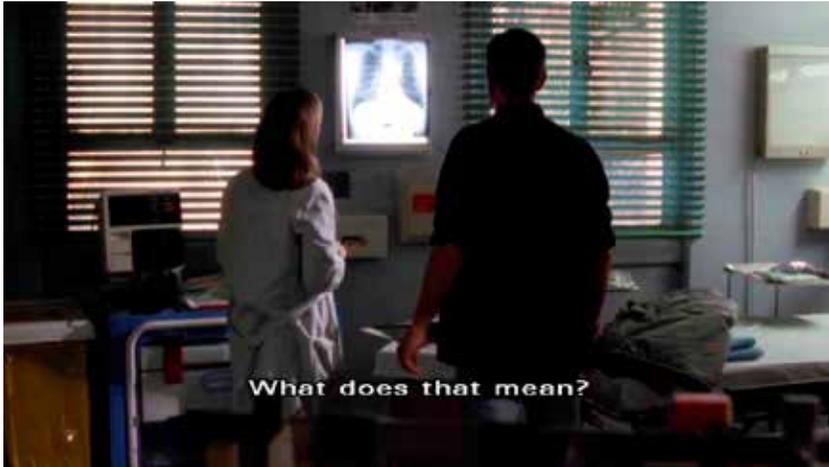
really drives them and, by the end of the story, they can accept themselves for who they are. The fact that these novels are wholly made up does not prevent them from raising questions that their young audience struggle with in this phase of their life. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons these books are so popular.

The existential television series we studied are somewhat more complex because, besides a number of narrative procedures, they also employ non-textual, filmic means. We have illustrated this using four examples. First, we discussed the way in which *mise-en-scène* works. The images in American television series evoke an imaginary world that is ordered, meticulous arranged and well-integrated. All props and characters are put in the frame in such a manner that everything on the plane is visually balanced. Second, we discussed the issue of colour and lighting. In these series, frequent use is made of the interplay between light and shadow in order to create a certain atmosphere. Colours are combined to direct our attention to a certain event or to underline that emotions are being addressed, so as to allow us to imagine the inner motives of the characters. Third, facial expressions and acting style play an important role. American television series present the face as a landscape that shows emotions in a rather stylised manner – even when it concerns fierce emotions. Fourth, what police series and hospital drama have in common is that, from time to time, the right combination of lighting, colour, facial expressions, editing and other filmic tools organise a *plausible* and *credible* imaginary world in which so-called ‘moments of empathy’ are created. These are moments when a dramatic event announces itself, with lighting, facial expressions, sound or music cooperating in such a manner that the viewer is moved emotionally as well as morally.

Because of this, the existential television drama is first and foremost an affective affair. The way it arouses and forms viewers’ moral sentiments differs greatly from the means employed in fantasy novels. Although it is clear that fantasy novels stir up such feelings as well, in novels only textual devices are employed. In film, several different senses are mobilised. As a consequence, moral motives are intensely felt, even though they are often only fleeting in nature. The ‘disadvantage’ of such a short duration of feelings is more than compensated for by the nearly endless supply of existential television series, which has grown even greater now that such series are becoming ever more easily accessible in the form of DVD box sets and via the internet. The supply is not just wide and varied, it is also eagerly watched by many. It is clear that these existential television series are not simply about moral heroes but that they also deal with

behaviours that clash with moral values. However, this does not detract from the thesis we set out to discuss in this chapter. In our view, moral imagination is also at work in fantasy novels, existential television series, films and other forms of popular culture. If we consider the variation, range and intensity of this imagination, we can no longer maintain the contention that the sensitivity to moral values has declined. In fact, given the research presented in this chapter, the reverse conclusion is far more convincing.

BREAKING THE BAD NEWS



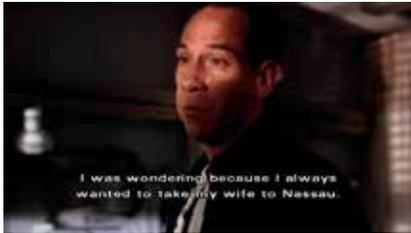
1.1 USA: ER: 1-pilot-a



1.2 USA: ER: 1-pilot-b



1.3 USA: ER: 1-pilot-c

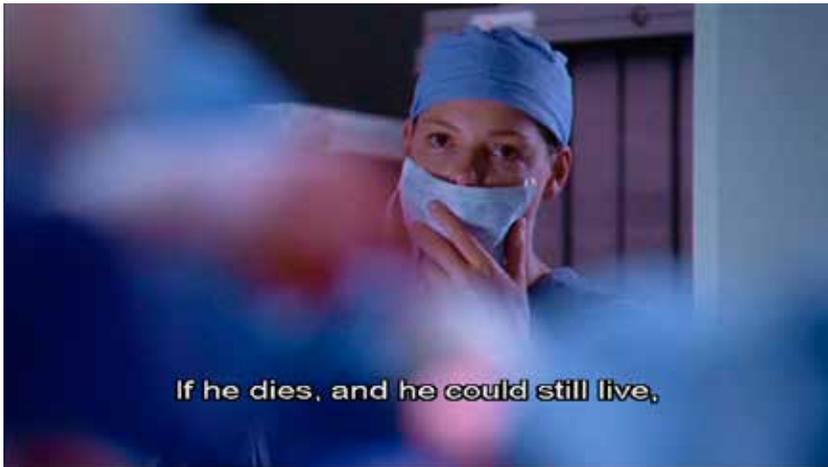


1.4 USA: ER: 1-pilot-d



1.5 USA: ER: 1-pilot-e

IMAGE COMPOSITION AND MISE-EN-SCÈNE



2.1 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 1.3



2.2 DUTCH: De Co-assistent [The Intern]: 1.10

IMAGE COMPOSITION AND MISE-EN-SCÈNE



3.1 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.2



3.2 Dutch: Grijpstra & De Gier: 2.9

A BATTLEFIELD OF EMOTIONS: FACIAL EXPRESSIONS AND LIGHTING



4.1 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 2.27



4.2 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 3.12



4.3 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 3.9



4.4 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.7



4.5 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.5



4.6 USA: The District: 2.4



4.7 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 2.25-a



4.8 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 2.25-b

PROFESSIONAL DILIGENCE



5.1 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 3.6-a



5.2 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 3.6-b



5.3 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 2.24



5.4 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 3.5

A DEATH



5.5 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 3.12-a



5.6 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 3.12-b



5.7 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 3.12-c



5.8 USA: Grey's Anatomy: 3.12-d

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP



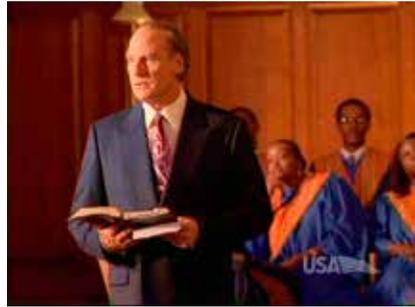
6.1 USA: The District: 1.3-a



6.2 USA: The District: 1.3-b



6.3 USA: The District: 1.3-c



6.4 USA: The District: 1.3-d

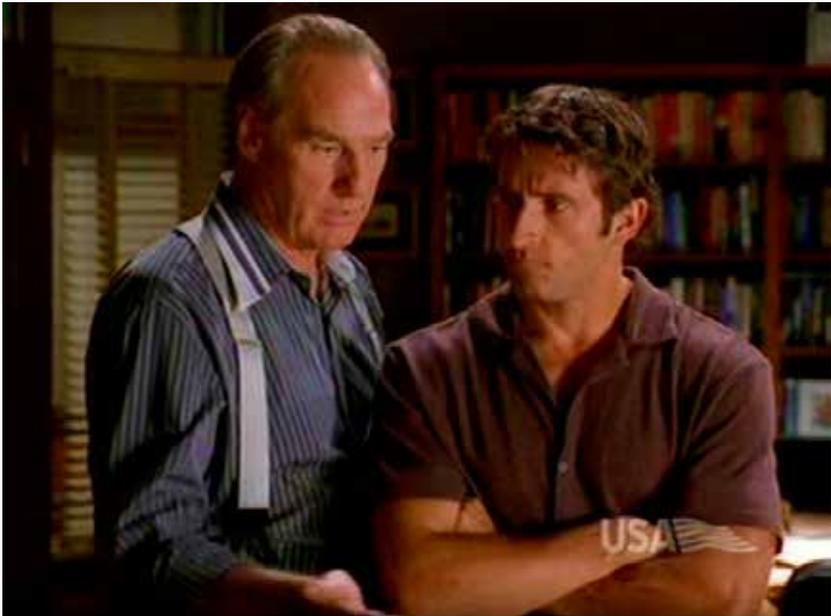


6.5 USA: The District: 1.3-e

ADRESSING UNPROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR



7.1 USA: The District: 2.3-a



7.2 USA: The District: 2.3-b

MOMENTS OF EMPATHY



8.1 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.2-a



8.2 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.2-b



8.3 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.2-c



8.4 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.2-d



8.5 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.7-a



8.6 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.7-b



8.7 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.7-c



8.8 USA: NYPD Blue: 1.7-d

Part 5

9 Signs of moral resilience

Wieger Bakker, Gabriël van den Brink & Erik van Ingen

Preceding chapters explored different facets of the complex relationship between morality and modernity. Chapters 3 and 4 revealed that certain features of the modern way of life have a negative impact insofar as they discourage the tendency towards moral behaviour. This is particularly evident in the public domain. Likewise, we saw that sometimes it works differently in that modernisation does not result in the elimination but rather the alteration of moral commitments. Chapters 5 and 6 illustrated that this applies in particular to citizens' lifestyles. Finally, we also discovered that, in certain areas, moral sensitivity is actually growing stronger, a tendency that was illustrated in chapters 7 and 8 with regard to professional life. In the present chapter we discuss a final possibility, namely that modern existence does not have any impact on the moral values of citizens. It may even be that those values are used to compensate for or to counteract certain drawbacks of modernisation.

The best known example of such compensation is the welfare state that developed in various European countries after the Second World War. The welfare state is an arrangement that fulfils many economic, social and political functions while also having moral implications. Its purpose is, after all, to protect people from the adverse effects of illness, old age, unemployment and other risks inherent in the functioning of a market economy. Its costs are largely borne by corporations and the citizens themselves, and the welfare state can therefore be regarded as an organised form of solidarity. It is questionable whether such an arrangement can survive without any kind of moral commitment. There are, however, two reasons why we will sidestep questions about the welfare state in this chapter. First, this book is not concerned with the state, politics or government but rather modern society. Second, the currently existing form of the welfare state is undergoing a radical transformation of which the outcome is anything but clear. We therefore focus on several forms of moral commitment that seem to be immune to modern dynamics or that, in fact, provide evidence of moral resilience.

This commitment can take many forms. We begin by asking whether and to what extent religious traditions provide a certain counterweight to modern life (section 1). We then discuss the growth in the number of volunteers (section 2) and their reasons for doing something for their fellow

human beings (section 3). The state of development aid in the Netherlands is examined (section 4), including the moral images and expectations that play a role in this (section 5). We then reflect on the many Dutch citizens who have been involved in recent decades in the preservation of nature and the environment (section 6) and subsequently draw attention to more recent social initiatives. We examine the extent to which these initiatives involve new activities (section 7), the motivations at play (section 8) and the reasons why they are occurring at this time (section 9). Based on the above, we conclude that moral commitment is flourishing in many respects (section 10).

1 Lasting religious interest

We noted earlier that the modernisation of the Netherlands has had a negative impact on the social significance of churches. Church membership is shrinking, and its message no longer has the same impact that it used to have. However, this is only half the story. Although the institutional elements of faith have been undermined, certain values, ideas or sentiments from the Christian tradition remain staunchly in effect. This is apparent from the fact that belief in God or in something divine is still fully present in modern society. It would seem that this belief possesses a certain immunity or resilience to the drive to modernise.

To illustrate this point, we once again refer to the European Values Study (EVS), which examines many questions concerning religiosity. Table 9.1 indicates how these questions were answered in 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008. It also reveals the average score for all the years as well as the direction of the trend. With regard to the latter, we first conducted a statistical test.¹ If there is a significant effect, this can be either positive or negative.

The results demonstrate that the institutional side of religiosity has lost strength in the Netherlands. Both the share of the population that goes to church regularly (first row) and the share that are members of a religious denomination (second row) have decreased over the past thirty years. Between 1981 and 1999, the decline was very strong for most indicators, after which the development (virtually) stagnates. The institutional side was indeed subject to erosion, except that a stable base level has been reached.

¹ The (linear) trend can be tested by performing a series of regression analyses (OLS), with the religious indicators as dependent variables and 'measurement year' as the independent variable.

Table 9.1 Trend in religiosity in the Netherlands 1981-2008 (multiple dimensions)

	1981	1990	1999	2008	average	trend
Church attendance ^a	39	30	25	24	29	Negative
Religious affiliation ^b	63	51	45	48	52	Negative
Religious ^c	2.42	2.07	2.00	1.98	2.11	Negative
Church adequacy ^d	1.34	1.21	1.15	1.28	1.25	n.s. ⁱ
Prayers ^e	61	67	69	64	65	n.s. ⁱ
Person ^f	70	60	62	60	63	Negative
Importance of God ^g	5.35	4.88	4.93	4.73	4.95	Negative
Religion as support ^h	50	45	43	43	45	Negative

Source: EVS NL 1981-2008

Note:

^a Attends religious services at least once a month (percent)

^b Is affiliated with a religious denomination (percent)

^c Has religious convictions (scale 1-5)

^d Feels that the church gives adequate answers to problems (scale 1-3)

^e Cultivates moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation (percent)

^f Regards him/herself as a religious person (percent)

^g Importance of God in life (scale 1-10)

^h Derives strength and support from religion (percent)

ⁱ n.s. = non-significant

The picture is quite different for the subsequent two indicators. The third row provides information about the strength of religious convictions, measured by the extent to which one believes in entities such as God, life after death, heaven and hell. The score refers to the average number of items that respondents said they believed in. This number decreases between 1981 and 1999, but then the decline stops. Opinions about church legitimacy (fourth row) level out in a similar manner. Respondents were asked if they felt that ‘generally speaking... the churches are giving, in the Netherlands, adequate answers to 1) the moral problems and needs of the individual, 2) the problems of family life and 3) people’s spiritual needs’. The score again reflects the average number of items that a respondent endorsed. Although this number declined during the 1980s, the trend over the entire period was not significant. This is certainly noteworthy: while respondents are going to church less, they do not appear to be of the opinion that the church is losing its legitimacy.²

² Our findings date from a period when the stories about sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church were not yet generally known. The possibility may not be excluded that these scandals have seriously undermined the credibility of the church and its authorities.

While the top four rows concern topics traditionally associated with the Christian faith, the four bottom rows focus on the personal meaning of religiosity. Respondents are asked, for example, whether they experience moments of prayer, meditation or contemplation (fifth row). This percentage is not only relatively high but also reasonably constant at around 65 percent. A very broad definition of 'prayer' may play a role in this high percentage. Nevertheless, studies based on other sources yield similar figures.³ There is a slight discernible decline in the percentage of Dutch citizens who regard themselves as 'believers' (sixth row), but the share in the last year of measurement remained considerably high at 60 percent. The percentage is, in any case, higher than what might be expected based on the process of secularisation described in chapter 4. Moreover, no significant reduction has occurred over the last twenty years. The same was the case when respondents were asked about the importance of God to them. On a scale of 1 (entirely unimportant) to 10 (very important), the average score for the Netherlands was 4.95, not far from the midpoint of the scale. The downward trend was primarily the result of a strong decline in the 1980s. A similar pattern is visible in the percentage of respondents who derive strength and support from religion; there is also a decrease in this figure between 1981 and 1990, after which the level stabilises at 44 percent. Adopting a general view of Table 9.1 reveals that, with the exception of church attendance, the examined indicators do not show any clear decrease over the period 1990-2008, even though most indicators do display a decline over the period 1980-1990. In other words, there is a significant share of Dutch citizens who have 'some' feeling for religion, but this sentiment is, over time, less and less reflected in church attendance. The image described by Grace Davie as 'believing without belonging' appears to be increasingly applicable to the Netherlands.⁴

2 The scale and trend in volunteering

The second phenomenon suggesting the existence of a certain immunity to modernisation is volunteer work. Although the academic literature provides many definitions of this term, most descriptions contain three elements: 1) it involves a freely chosen activity 2) for which no or only modest

3 Bänzinger, Janssen & Scheepers 2008.

4 Davie 1994, 2000; see also Hervieu-Léger 2003.

compensation is paid and 3) which benefits others.⁵ A fourth element may limit volunteer work to activities performed in a formal context, such as an organisation or association. Without this restriction, we would also have to include the care that people provide for their elderly parents as volunteer work. In any case, the EVS makes use of this latter restriction, as it presents respondents with a list of organisations and types of organisations, asking them to indicate if they perform any unpaid work for the listed entities. Possible examples include trade unions, church organisations, cultural associations, political parties and youth organisations. The EVS also asks respondents about donations. Compared with volunteer work, donating money constitutes a more passive form of involvement, but the information belongs to the same section of the survey. This is the section in which respondents indicate whether they 'belong to' an organisation dedicated to upholding human rights, nature conservation, etc. What changes are these organisations undergoing in the Netherlands? Has the process of modernisation had a positive or a negative effect on their activity?

To help formulate answers to these questions, Table 9.2 displays the trend in volunteer work in recent decades.⁶ We look not only at organisations in a more general sense but also organisations that might be identified as 'idealistic'.⁷ We know that academic research into volunteering often provides evidence of a certain pessimism. Researchers debate a great deal about whether or not there is a decline.⁸ Our information from the EVS reveals that there are few reasons to be pessimistic. There is even a significant increase in the percentage of Dutch citizens who do volunteer work, and this increase also applies to idealistic organisations.

The increase between 1990 and 1999 is certainly greater than in the nine subsequent years. A breakdown by type of organisation (idealistic or not, with or without religious background, etc.) produces no major differences in terms of trend. Admittedly, this increase in volunteer work has not been detected in other studies. Some report a stable level of participation, while

5 Cnaan, Handy & Wadworth 1996.

6 The number of organisations from which to choose was considerably smaller in 1981, as a result of which respondents may have been less triggered to think of volunteer work for the organisations that were not mentioned (despite the option to report volunteering for 'other organisations'). For this reason, survey year 1981 will be left out of consideration in this section.

7 Factor analysis reveals that a distinction can be made between an altruistic dimension and an egotistic dimension in motivation. The scores of the volunteers for these dimensions were examined by type of organisation. 'Idealistic volunteer work' is volunteer work for organisations in which altruistic motives are dominant.

8 Paxton 1999, Putnam 2000.

others discern a contraction.⁹ This discrepancy is difficult to explain, since the data used are relatively diverse in terms of sample, questioning, measurement year and type of research. These fluctuations have been signalled before in research on volunteer work over time and across countries (using EVS data).¹⁰

Table 9.2 Participation in volunteer work in the Netherlands 1990-2008

	1990	1999	2008	Total
Average number of organisations ^a	0.65	0.86	0.97	0.85
Works for at least one organisation ^b	34	47	45	42
Works for at least one idealistic organisation ^c	20	25	28	25
Idem excluding church organisations ^d	15	19	22	20

Note:

^a Indicates the number of organisations for which the average Dutch citizen does volunteer work;

^b percentage of Dutch citizens working for at least one organisation;

^c percentage of Dutch citizens working for at least one idealistic organisation;

^d percentage of Dutch citizens working for at least one idealistic organisation, excluding organisations of a religious nature.

Referring to the comments made in chapter 2 about forms of ‘moral commitment’, we now look at the share of the Dutch population providing a financial contribution to organisations dedicated to environmental and nature conservation, or human rights. Currently, environmental and nature conservation organisations are supported by 21 percent of Dutch citizens, while the percentage supporting international aid and solidarity is 23 percent. In chapter 10, we demonstrate that this broad interest in tertiary organisations is a typically Dutch phenomenon. Around the turn of the millennium, for example, 52 percent of the population had made donations to human rights organisations or environmental and nature conservation organisations. This percentage is higher than in any other European country. Additionally, the Netherlands is among the leaders in terms of volunteer work, a finding that has also been recorded in other studies.¹¹ This participation rate is partly due to the level of prosperity in the Netherlands; donations and volunteering are generally related to the

9 Van Ingen 2009; De Hart & Dekker 2009.

10 See Dekker & Van den Broek 2006.

11 Pichler & Wallace 2007.

prosperity of a country.¹² However, prosperity is not the only contributing factor. The question of what motivates people to give money must also be considered.

3 Mixed motives

Religiosity and level of education always play a prominent role in the motives for volunteering and donating.¹³ The influence of religion is based on the fact that volunteer services and charities are often organised by churches, with the recruitment of volunteers and donors taking place within church congregations. Some authors argue that ideological motives are also important: religious organisations promote altruistic values, which would constitute an impulse for charitable giving or volunteering. However, it appears that this idea is debatable at both the theoretical and empirical levels.¹⁴ In addition to believers, highly educated individuals are more active as volunteers than the lower educated. This is often explained by three factors: skills, attitudes and social networks.¹⁵ Highly educated people generally possess greater social or organisational skills. As a result, they are better equipped to perform volunteer work than those who have had little education. Furthermore, they often adopt pro-social behaviour and adjust their actions accordingly. Finally, those with a higher education have access to a larger social network, as a result of which they are more likely to be asked to donate or to perform volunteer work.

It is striking that these explanations have little to do with the moral aspects of volunteering. They relate mainly to the social factors that compel members of certain groups (believers, the highly educated) to frequently commit themselves as volunteers. However, they say little about the motivation of the persons concerned. This is precisely what we are concerned about in this study because we want to know how modernity and moral sensitivity are interrelated. Therefore let us examine the reasons that volunteer workers themselves give for doing what they do.

12 Cf. Curtis, Baer & Crabb 2001. Furthermore, volunteer work and donorship display a strong mutual correlation (Pearson's $R = 0.60$).

13 Bekkers 2004, Ruijter & De Graaf 2006.

14 Wilson & Janoski 1995.

15 Oesterle, Kirkpatrick, Johnson & Mortimer 2004; Wilson & Musick 1997.

Table 9.3 Motivations (percent) for performing volunteer work in the Netherlands 1990

	important or very important
For social reasons	59
To acquire new skills and experiences	58
Because I have enough time for it	51
To make a contribution to my neighbourhood	48
Because I can put myself in the shoes of people who are suffering	45
Due to a moral obligation or task	45
As a way of giving something back	39
Out of solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged	35
Out of compassion for the needy	33
To help the less fortunate	29
Out of religious conviction	26
To bring about social and political change	22
Personal satisfaction	19
Did not want to but could not refuse	7

Source: EVS NL 1990

We already mentioned in chapter 5 that such motivations as personal benefit, religious duty or the need to help others tend to overlap.¹⁶ Table 9.3 shows a number of more specific motives. Respondents were allowed to give more than one motive. There are various interwoven themes: the respondents identified both practical and idealistic motivations, as well as both social and individual reasons. They most often referred to 'social motives'. Over 59 percent of all volunteers indicated that they find this motivation important or very important. Unfortunately, this category can be understood in several ways. It may be that people volunteer in order to 'make social contacts' or because they 'wish to be among the people', but it could just as well be that they 'want to help another member of society'. Viewed through the broad classification that was previously proposed, these motives are closely interlinked; people acting on this basis are not primarily focused on God (sacred motive) nor are they seeking intense experiences (vital motive). The result is also consistent with the finding that moral sensitivity in the Netherlands takes a predominantly social form.¹⁷ At the same time, it cannot be said that other motivations are entirely

¹⁶ See in particular Tables 5.7 and 5.8.

¹⁷ Chapter 5, section 2.

absent. Experiencing something new is almost as frequently mentioned (58 percent). It is noteworthy that forms of empathy are invoked in more than one category. Examples include interrelated motives such as putting oneself in the shoes of others who are suffering (45 percent), solidarity with the disadvantaged or poor (35 percent), compassion for the needy (33 percent) or helping the less fortunate (29 percent).

What relationship does modernisation have with volunteering and charitable giving? We already saw that there is a correlation with religiosity. Recent research indicates that the decrease in church attendance in the Netherlands has had a negative effect on volunteer work.¹⁸ On this basis, we might expect the transition from traditional religious values to secular values to result in a decrease in the number of donors or volunteers. However, there are also reasons to think that this expectation is unfounded. After all, modernisation does not only entail secularisation but also a greater emphasis on personal growth. Partly for this reason, Inglehart detected a correlation between self-development and the performance of volunteer work. He came to the conclusion that people who place importance on values related to self-expression are more likely to undertake volunteer work than people who have little regard for such values. This observation is consistent with the finding that the 'acquisition of new skills and experiences' in Table 9.3 occupies the second highest position. There are therefore two opposing processes: modernisation can both stimulate volunteer work (vitalisation) and curb it (secularisation). The relative strength of these two tendencies determines whether the overall impact on volunteer work is positive or negative.

To determine which tendency is the strongest, we performed a regression analysis on volunteer work. More specifically, we analysed the degree to which participation in volunteer work changed between 1981 and 2008. This revealed a significant increase in the number of volunteers in the Netherlands over the time period. Not surprisingly, this trend cannot be explained by the fact that the Dutch population has abandoned traditional religious values and embraced more secular ones. This is to be expected given the above, and it also corresponds with the results of our regression analysis: there is a discernible negative effect of secularisation on volunteer work. At the same time, volunteering is positively affected by self-expression, which explains a part of the increase over time. Furthermore, the increase in the level of education also contributed to the growth. Since 1981 the share of people with a higher education has grown and, along with

18 Van Ingen 2009.

it, the participation in volunteer work. All in all, 28 percent of the trend in volunteer work may be explained by a combination of changes in values and higher levels of education.

The same analysis was then performed on donations. We already know that the number of Dutch donors has substantially increased in recent decades. This increase does not appear to be related to the two dimensions that characterise modern society according to Inglehart: secularisation (or the transition from religious traditions to more secular ideas) and vitalisation (or the transition from survival values to self-expression). Our regression analysis shows that secularisation does not lead to any change in donorship. In contrast, the shift from survival values to self-expression did have a positive effect. The same applies to the level of education, which correlates with donorship. Given that the average level of education in the Netherlands has increased since 1981, part of the increase in the number of donors can be explained by the rise in the educational level. However, much of the trend remains unexplained (only 11 percent of the increase can be explained by the latter two changes).

To sum up, interest in volunteer work and donations has undeniably increased in the Netherlands in the last three decades. Of the factors we examined above, secularisation does not play a major role. Although secularisation does exert downward pressure on the number of volunteers, this is offset by two other trends: first, the fact that Dutch citizens are increasingly less concerned with survival, while the values relating to self-expression have gained in importance; and second, the gradual increase in the level of education. As a result of these developments, more and more Dutch citizens are becoming involved in organisations dedicated to social engagement. This confirms once again that moral sensitivity has not disappeared from society but rather assumed a different form. While traditional forms of religious commitment have come under pressure, more secular forms are flourishing.

4 Types of development aid

A comparable transformation is occurring in the field of development aid. There has been much debate on this subject in recent years, with questions being asked from all sides concerning the effectiveness and professionalism of this aid. Although the political and social support for development aid has remained substantial for decades, it has come under heavy criticism.¹⁹

19 See WRR (2010) and Bakker 2010.

Despite decades of development aid, economic growth in many poor countries was found to have hardly increased. And in countries where the economy did grow, it was unclear how much of this could be attributed to aid. However, we have to distinguish two issues here. Questions can (and should!) be asked about the effects that Dutch development aid has had in the world. Questions can (and may!) also be asked about the significance that aid has had for the Dutch population. This latter point has been insufficiently covered in the discussions on development aid. If this aid is viewed as a form of moral commitment, then the second set of questions is crucial, and we have every reason to ask them. For Dutch citizens, development aid is, in fact, often a way of demonstrating a certain ideal and establishing some distance from the self-interest that corrupts their everyday actions. Our focus is mainly on private projects, as the moral dimension is most visible there.

Compared with the total amount of money devoted annually to development aid, the world of small-scale initiatives and private donations does not involve overly large sums. Apart from the roughly €300 million that Dutch households donate annually, there is a sum of €4.5 billion in the Dutch national budget earmarked for development aid. Evidently, the Dutch feel that improving the world is mainly a task for the national government. This public task is partly executed via the country's embassies (the bilateral channel). Another portion is allocated to international organisations (the multilateral channel). Approximately 10 to 15 percent of development aid takes shape through publicly funded social organisations (the so-called civil-lateral channel). All this means that approximately €500 million euros in development aid is allocated to more than 75 larger, more or less professionalised aid organisations.²⁰

It is striking that interest in private projects or initiatives has grown in recent years. Although the exact number is hard to give due to the small-scale nature of many of these initiatives, it is estimated that in 2009 the total number of private initiatives in the Netherlands was somewhere between 6,400 and 15,000. Almost one-third of these initiatives were younger than 5 years.²¹ This growth has not only occurred in terms of the numbers of initiatives and involved citizens but also in terms of the types and variety of initiatives. Sometimes they involve initiatives that start with or are

20 Well-known examples of such organisations are Oxfam Novib, Cordaid, the Interchurch organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), the Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (Hivos) and Plan Nederland.

21 Kinsbergen 2014., p.56-57.

supported by a *sustainable social context* such as the family, school, business, neighbourhood, church or (sports) club. They may also involve a *temporary social context* in which the participants or organisers commit themselves to a development activity for a limited period. This could involve a sports tournament, festival or other event that contributes to fund-raising. On some occasions, projects are adopted for a *long time* (support for a village, school or hospital); on other occasions, these activities are in response to an *incident or disaster* (tsunami, earthquake). Sometimes they involve actions that are developed or organised *by the volunteers themselves*; other times they support *work performed by others* (including professional agencies). The contribution may be made by collecting goods or *raising money*, or it may require a *personal contribution* in the form of help in the realisation of a project. No matter how varied the initiatives, they all have something in common. Meaningfulness and the desire to give concrete form to a spiritual commitment always play a major role.²²

Apart from the issue of which projects to support, there appear to be three reasons for participating or providing support. The first reason is that Dutch citizens can individually or collectively make a *concrete 'difference' in the living conditions of their fellow human beings*. This theme can be seen in the *mission statements* of the organisations involved. We repeatedly encounter slogans such as 'A chance for a child', 'Help turn a street child into a school child', 'Help disabled children build a future' or 'A good bed for every patient'. Such slogans call on people to make a tangible contribution to a better world for a specific group of people.²³ A second reason is that these activities are considered important for the *spiritual education of young people*. The idea is to make young people aware that they occupy a privileged position in the world as Dutch citizens, and to make them feel responsible for others whose living conditions are much less favourable. In addition, it is not so much a matter of transmitting particular religious or humanitarian values to young people; the point is for them to learn to make themselves useful in the context of development aid. A third reason is that the organised context of people's lives is *being raised to a higher plane* in terms of social commitment. We see this happening when companies or institutions associate themselves with charitable causes or at events devoted to a specific development objective.

22 Kinsbergen & Schulpen 2010; see also Van den Berg 2012.

23 See the websites of such organisations as Impulsis, Wild Geese or the Dutch Centre for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development (NCDO). We made extensive use of data provided by the organisations on their websites for our understanding of development aid. They were last consulted on 27 October 2010.

There is, however, a clear tension between the recognisable reasons for offering aid and the complicated reality in developing countries. The world of development aid is all too often faced with an unruly and complex state of affairs. In the midst of geo-political differences and unwilling regimes, governments from donor countries, either through bilateral or multilateral cooperation, attempt to contribute to economic development in a trial-and-error fashion via *budget support* and the promotion of *good governance*. It is a world that is far from the meaningful context in which people give shape to their ideals. Citizens of developed countries know very little of this world.²⁴ On the contrary, logos and fundraising campaigns of non-governmental development organisations are replete with vocabulary that refers to the good world and the opportunity that each one of us has to make a personal contribution to it. Think of the use of words such as *fair* in relation to trade (Fair Trade, Fair Wear, Fair Trade Community, Fair Banking, Fair Climate), or *freedom* and *voice* in the context of human rights (Freevoice, A Child's Voice).²⁵ It is primarily the private development organisations that deliberately draw on the images of the good world held by committed citizens. Here we observe a kind of mutual dependence or interconnectedness: on the one hand, these organisations are partly dependent on private donors not only for income but also for public support for their activities. To maintain their

24 A study for the NCDO shows that development aid is almost always identified with the activities of private organisations. The messages from these organisations to their potential donors are closely linked to the moral pursuit of a better world. They often make use of unequivocal images that are also reflected in the mission statements of large organisations. For instance, ICCO refers to 'a world without poverty or injustice' where people have a dignified existence (ICCO website 2010). The ideal of Oxfam is 'a world in which everyone can build a life for themselves' (Oxfam Novib website 2010). Cordaid states that it believes 'in human dignity' while trusting that people 'can realise a better future themselves' (Cordaid website 2010). Such ideals contract strongly with the way a substantial amount of news media shape their reporting on the countries involved.

25 Ideals of a good world are even discernible in the references made to the relations between donor countries and developing countries. The details, which were often concerned with technicalities, concerning the accountability of money and the permanently asymmetric relation between the aid-provider and the aid-recipient countries are mentioned using almost utopian terminology. A term such as 'international cooperation' alludes to the pursuit of equality among nations and peoples. The same applies to terms such as *ownership* and *mutual accountability*. By emphasising the importance of 'ownership' in development, reference is made to a world in which people or parties exist independently. The term 'mutual accountability' implies that people or parties are equal. Of course, it is not just private organisations that communicate with us in terms of the good world. State authorities and politicians also transmit such messages, although the image is less clear. For example, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs includes the following on its website: 'The Netherlands is helping to build a safe, stable and prosperous world. We are committed to fighting poverty, injustice and conflict, and to defending the interests of Dutch nationals abroad' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010).

own legitimacy, alignment with 'our' values is crucial. On the other hand, these organisations offer 'us' the opportunity to work towards a good world and translate our spiritual commitment into practical action.

The way in which private organisations shape the commitment of their donors does, however, entail a risk. Anyone who deliberately plays on the moral values of the public must carry out their own work in a careful and responsible manner. In this regard, reports appearing in the press in recent years may be eroding public support for these organisations. Examples include directors who allow themselves to be paid (excessively) high salaries or who gloss over their organisation's disappointing results. Another illustration is the use of mass mailings to collect money: the increasing irritation this causes among the public must be weighed against the possibility of collecting extra income. Such concerns belong more in a commercial setting than an organisation claiming to be acting on the basis of idealism. Such organisations, so it seems, frequently lose sight of the individuals whose spiritual commitment they are shaping and no longer know whose ideals they represent. In any event, aid organisations seeking public support over the longer term must ensure that they cannot be accused of a cynical approach.

5 Changing images

Similar to volunteer work, the pursuit of a better world rests on a long tradition. The task of bridging the gap between the bad and the good world has been carried out for generations. There were always three elements involved: a) an image of the imperfect world that belongs to the present, b) an image of the utopian world that belongs to the future, and c) an image of the actions necessary to bring the utopian world closer. In this respect, historians in the field of development aid identify continuity rather than major fractures.²⁶ This continuity is, perhaps, related to a notion that, according to Jonathan Israël, was characteristic of the Dutch Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century, namely the realisation that economic and moral decay were interrelated.²⁷ This view took several forms over subsequent centuries, casting an ever-changing light on the moral project.

²⁶ Nekkers & Malcontent 1999, p. 31 ff.

²⁷ The relationship between economic and moral decay was based on the idea at the time that moral perfection was attainable if reason was systematically applied to human action and if additional support could be derived from a tolerant, non-dogmatic belief in God (Israel 1997, p. 1198).

In the first phase, there is an assumption of an *unbelieving* and *uncivilised* world. The utopia corresponding to this refers to a world that is completely Christianised; where people behave in a responsible manner; where they act on the basis of morality, civilisation and development; and where their own spiritual welfare is assured. Missionary work was the way in which people could contribute to the advent of this world. Moral commitment was embodied in the missionary taking up his task outside Europe. At the same time, it also took shape through the grass-roots provision of financial or other support for missionaries and the organisations for which they worked. This view was supported in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the hunt for colonial gain and the emergence of a European bourgeoisie in the colonies went hand in hand with a growing focus on social discrepancies in 'tropical Netherlands' and the endeavour to ensure the spread of civilisation through missionaries or missions. Ultimately, this led to what has become identified as the Dutch Ethical Policy (*ethische politiek*). If Eduard Douwes Dekker did not contribute to this development with his 1860 book *Max Havelaar*, the subsequent legal charges against colonial practices in the Dutch East Indies did just that.²⁸

In the course of the twentieth century, this world-view had to make room for a vision primarily concerned with social rights.²⁹ The bad world was now characterised by the fact that people were suffering from *insecurity*, *oppression* and *unjust relations*. Consequently, the good world referred to a life in which social security is available, human rights are guaranteed and disadvantaged groups can work on their emancipation. Moral commitment now took the form of people standing up for the less fortunate, in solidarity with the poor and feeling responsible for the welfare of their fellow human beings. This also gave rise to new social initiatives. For example, development aid organisation Novib drew inspiration from the expansion of the welfare state in the Netherlands at that time. Moral commitment later also manifested itself in action groups that offered support for emancipation campaigns or resistance movements. This took the form of participating in boycotts or demonstrations aimed at *regime change* in third world countries. Such forms of moral commitment often went hand in hand with protesting against the injustices in one's own society and opposing governments that

28 See, for example, the influential article 'Een Ereschuld' (A debt of honour) by Conrad Theodor van Deventer, published in 1899. In his overview of Dutch development aid, historian Johannes de Jong considers 'ethical missionary zeal with its emphasis on economic backwardness and its conviction that the Netherlands had the eminent task of 'supporting less prosperous' countries' as an important characteristic of the Dutch national identity (De Jong 1999, p. 79).

29 Kuitenbrouwer 1994.

do too little to realise a good world given their support for colonialism or the arms industry.

Finally, recent decades have given rise to a world-view in which there is a lack of fairness and equality. This time, the bad world is characterised by the fact that rich and developed countries maintain their *privileged position* at the expense of poor countries. At the same time, these poor countries have an additional problem because all wealth is accumulated by a *privileged upper layer* that denies the majority of the population a decent life without hunger, disease and poverty. A good world would entail the possibility for people to develop themselves and make their own choices. Moral commitment then takes the form of initiatives that contribute to the development of specific groups or people. In the 1990s, this led to a tension between on the one hand the desire for economic development, an equitable distribution of wealth, poverty reduction and access to education and healthcare and, on the other, the Netherlands' interest in a safe and stable world or in access to new markets. Along with the changed East-West relations after the fall of the Berlin Wall, government policy began to place less emphasis on individual projects. Instead, the focus shifted to broad segments of society; instruments such as market mechanisms were more frequently deployed; and the strengthening of democracy or *good governance* became more important.

Moving rapidly through the past century, we see that there is often an ambiguous relationship between two sets of motives: the aforementioned motives for the benefit of a good world and motives that are usually categorised as self-interest. This ambiguity, clearly highlighted in the recent debates on the moral motivations and self-interest involved in development aid, appears to be a historical constant. There have certainly been a variety of reactions to this ambiguous situation over the years – reactions that did not appear out of thin air but were related to the way in which Dutch society viewed itself and to the ideals that set the tone in the period concerned. Thus, thinking in terms of civilisation and moral virtue was a typical phenomenon of the end of the nineteenth century, a time when many parts of the Netherlands were struggling with the effects of large-scale industrialisation. In line with this came the idea of a moral responsibility towards the population in the colonies. The same applies to the way in which people gave form to their own spiritual commitment: both within the church and within more politically oriented associations (unions, parties), conduct had a strong moral accent. In a similar way, the development of the Dutch welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s had an impact on how moral action was given shape during that period. It was not so much morality but the

quest for emancipation and democratisation that was paramount. The shift in focus created new content and forms with regard to development aid. In terms of content, work began on the emancipation of oppressed groups and disadvantaged peoples. New organisational forms were also invented, such as action groups concerned with a specific issue or movements that demonstrated solidarity with groups within the population.

These phenomena illustrate how the moral aspect of development aid reflects the dominant values of the Netherlands. This applies just as well to the most recent phase, which has been strongly influenced by individualisation and globalisation. People today wish to make their own choices and hence care little for institutional structures. This change in attitude might explain why private initiatives and private organisations are attracting so much interest. A phenomenon such as increased travel may also be contributing to this trend. Through personal experiences of particular locations in the world, the population living there and the problems existing there, people nowadays prefer to give form to their moral values in a more individual way. They therefore distance themselves from the traditional frameworks that, in an earlier phase, were an important vehicle for human solidarity.

6 Caring for nature and the environment

While striving for a better world outside Europe has a relatively long history, other forms of moral commitment are much younger. An example of the latter is the increase in appreciation of nature and the environment. The first signs of a new attitude towards nature date from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. According to Dirk-Jan Verdonk, the history of Dutch vegetarianism began in 1890, when the famous writer and physician Frederik van Eeden decided to stop eating meat.³⁰ His followers were successful for a time in making vegetarianism a respectable affair, but around the middle of the twentieth century, the 'first wave' was certainly over.

The second wave began around 1970. Partly due to the influence of changing mindsets in the 1960s, the number of vegetarians grew at a rapid rate. While their numbers were estimated at 10,000 in the mid-1960s, by 1980 it had reached 100,000. The number of health food stores similarly rose. This trend was accompanied by the emergence of new ideas about our relationship to nature. People began to question the strict separation between nature and culture, and some went even further by regarding

30 Verdonk 2009, p. 10, 16.

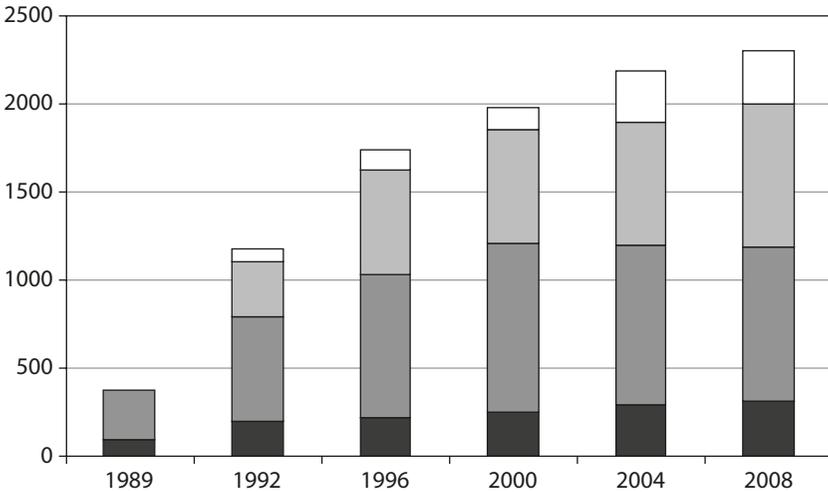
nature as a transcendental order.³¹ There was also a change in the form of this commitment: the original emphasis on spiritual values was gradually replaced by a more physical commitment to nature. By this we mean not only that there was more interest in biology but also that the fight against environmental pollution was conducted in a more physical way. The boats with which Greenpeace confronted seagoing vessels on the high seas or the ways in which opponents of nuclear waste chained themselves to a railway track appealed to many. The result was that the movement for environmental protection or nature conservation developed a massive following. Graph 9.1 shows the development in membership of nature conservation organisations over the last three decades. The total number of donors in the Netherlands increased from approximately 371,000 in 1989 to 2.3 million in 2008. Large organisations such as Natuurmonumenten and the World Wildlife Fund have been particularly successful in attracting new members. While this spectacular growth has levelled off recently, it is clear that the struggle for environmental protection and nature conservation can depend on mass support in the Netherlands. Questions may be asked about the values underlying this interest. Does it involve nostalgia for the early modern age? To what extent are vital values implicated? And how can this commitment be understood as a form of moral engagement?

According to researchers at the university in Wageningen, what is involved here is the classic opposition between people who link their self-interest to the welfare of others and those who primarily associate self-interest with personal performance and individual autonomy. They define this antithesis as one between *self-transcendence* and *self-enhancement*. This first opposition between 'self' and 'others' can then be combined with a second opposition, one between 'conservation' and 'development'. This ultimately results in a segmentation of the Dutch population into eight different attitudes that can be summarised as follows: 1) the open-minded, 2) the committed, 3) the pragmatic, 4) the caring, 5) the well-balanced, 6) the conservatives, 7) the luxury seekers and 8) the hedonists.³² Each of these attitudes is characterised by an attributed position in the tension between egoism and altruism on the one hand, and between conservation and innovation on the other. It is mainly the 'open-minded', the 'committed' and the 'caring' who show a significant appreciation for nature. Within the

31 Verdonk 2009, p. 184-188, 390-391.

32 The researchers in Wageningen use the WIN model developed by the TNS NIPO research bureau. It is based on a combination of socio-demographic and sociocultural properties. Further explanation can be found at <http://www.tns-nipo.com/expertise/>

Graph 9.1 Number of members (x 1000) of Provinciale Landschappen (black), Natuurmonumenten (dark grey), World Wildlife Fund (light grey) and other nature organisations (white)



Source: Vroege Vogels Parade 1999 ff.

segmentation, they occupy an altruistic position in which some (such as the caring) display a bias towards conservation while others (such as the open-minded) are focused on development. Groups that do not have much interest in nature are 'hedonists', 'luxury seekers' and 'conservatives'. The distinction between conservation and development plays a role with them as well, but they respond more selfishly.³³

In the context of our research into moral sentiments, this finding is certainly relevant. We see that the difference between selfish and altruistic action also affects the attitude of people towards nature. Research reveals that half of the population is involved in one or more activities related to nature. The character of these activities are widely varying. In order of popularity, they are: building birdhouses or feeding boards at home (32 percent), planting crops that are native to the region (18 percent), cleaning up waste (18 percent) and participating in the upkeep of nature (8 percent). This list demonstrates that we should not imagine 'nature conservation' in an all too heroic manner. People prefer low-threshold activities that can take place in their immediate vicinity. On the other hand, it does involve 'altruistic behaviour' as explained in chapter 2. In the above-mentioned activities,

³³ Bakker 2007, p. 12, 28-29, 83-84.

it is not self-interest but the interests of animals and plants that are given priority. Moreover, it is evident that the intensity of the commitment varies strongly. Some people take part in many activities: they work as volunteers, donate money to several organisations, are involved with environmental policy, and try to obtain information through various channels. The group of 'active' citizens constitutes 18 percent of the population. There is also a group of 'involved' citizens that make up 19 percent of the population. They undertake less activity but like to support nature conservation, a tendency that can be seen in the large number of memberships in such organisations. The third group comprises the 'average'. Although these individuals are less frequently members of an organisation, they love to be in nature. Finally, there is a fourth group of more 'passive' citizens, which constitutes 25 percent of the total. This last group engages in hardly any nature-related activity.³⁴

7 Social initiatives

The last domain where moral commitment arises is relatively new: it encompasses the many forms of social initiatives that have emerged over the past decade in the Netherlands.³⁵ They involve residents, businesses and other private parties that tackle all kinds of problems in their surroundings on their own initiative. The nature of these initiatives is extremely varied. On some occasions, an initiative may be due to a lack of cultural facilities, other times it may arise from a desire to combat social isolation and loneliness. Sometimes, the initiative-takers join in collective action because local governments fail to respond, and other times this collaboration occurs because someone has enthusiastic plans. A key characteristic of such collective efforts is that they are based on initiatives of the citizens themselves, with governments only participating at a later stage, if at all. To find out the extent of this phenomenon, we compiled a list of over 300 projects in 2013,³⁶ which revealed that three areas received the most attention. The most popular were initiatives intended to improve social contact (35 percent). Over a quarter of the initiatives related to nature and the

34 Bakker 2007, p. 65-66, 71.

35 The content of the following three sections is discussed in greater detail in Denktank VNG 2013.

36 It should be noted that this list does not comprise a representative sample. The large number of initiatives, their heterogeneous nature and the frequent absence of documentation made the compilation of a more adequate sample impossible.

environment (27 percent), and there were also many projects concerning the utilisation of public space (15 percent). These types of projects together accounted for 77 percent of the list. Initiatives in the area of culture and education or care and healthcare were less frequent (respectively 10 and 8 percent), while projects having an economic accent proved to be quite exceptional (5 percent).

Nevertheless, we cannot say that the interest for these themes have emerged out of thin air. The themes are related to the 'new social movements' of the 1980s, when activists devoted themselves to such matters as environmental protection, minority rights and problems in the area of spatial planning.³⁷ The idealism dating from that period still exists. At the same time, there are notable differences with the initiatives of today. The dissimilarities primarily concern the way in which the initiatives are organised and communicated. Intensive use is made of the internet and social media. We must remember that, thirty years ago, most families did not have a computer in their homes. Indications suggest that the rapid emergence of social media since 2005 has enormously stimulated this new wave of social initiatives. In addition, there is something paradoxical about the use made of these media, which make it possible to communicate with all parts of the world at any time but which are mainly used to bring people into contact with their immediate surroundings. This is now more often the case. A study on what has become known as the 'Facebook riots' in the north of the Netherlands indicates that modern media is used to maintain traditional friendships and social relations.³⁸ The cultivation of existing contacts also plays a role in social initiatives.

The establishment of such connections has more than just technical implications: it also enables the emergence of a new type of community. Nowadays, citizens attach greater significance to proximity and locality. More than ever, they are seeking a certain *affinity* with others. They like hooking up with fellow citizens who have similar interests or adhere to the same lifestyle.³⁹ In effect, these initiatives reveal an interesting antagonism. They show a desire for empathy, reassurance and warmth as compensation for a world that seems more and more anonymous, functional and large-scale. We are not the only ones to have come across such a dialectical movement. Some years ago, Manuel Castells noted how the process of

37 Van Noort 1988, Duyvendak et al. 1992.

38 Van den Brink et al. 2013a, p. 67-89.

39 Cf. Maffessoli 1996, p. 13-19, 40-44.

up-scaling was giving rise to a need for downscaling.⁴⁰ The more we become involved in worldwide networks, the more the significance of our milieu grows. In this sense, the flowering of social initiatives can be regarded as a moral response to the worldwide process of modernisation.

8 Rediscovering public values

What developments underlie these initiatives? Elsewhere in this book, we already argued that forms of idealistic commitment are fully prevalent in a modern society such as the Netherlands. Citizens exclusively focused on self-interest only constitute a minority of the population.⁴¹ Most Dutch citizens live and work on the basis of a mix: they do not disregard self-interest but combine it with care for others. There is, nevertheless, an important distinction from the forms of idealism manifested in the 1960s and 1970s, one that stems from two circumstances.

To begin with, the current blossoming of social initiatives is based not only on the ideal of commitment but also on a type of *entrepreneurship* that did not exist on this scale prior to the 1980s. There were, of course, entrepreneurs, but they were small in numbers and could not count on much appreciation within society. To put it more strongly, moral commitment in the 1960s and 1970s was a reaction against any form of capitalism, market economy and entrepreneurship. During this period, many regarded markets and morals to be diametrically opposed to each other. This attitude would only change at the beginning of the 1980s. From that time on, the logic of private enterprise began to penetrate sectors that had always operated on the basis of a different logic.⁴² As a result, entrepreneurship developed across the entire width of social life in the Netherlands. We encounter this attitude in professionals who are salaried workers but who view their careers in an enterprising manner. It is also perceivable among the growing group of

40 See Casells' opus magnum from 1997; it is not coincidental that the second volume is entitled *The Power of Identity*.

41 Chapter 5, section 2.

42 In the 1980s, Dutch hospitals, schools, postal services, broadcasters, universities, museums and other public and semi-public facilities began to see themselves as 'companies'. Consequently, lessons and medical procedures were defined as 'products', students and citizens were viewed as 'customers'; striving for 'efficiency' became the most important challenge; it was urged that 'market forces' be introduced everywhere, and school principals, mayors, civil servants, professors and artists were positioned as 'entrepreneurs'. With the philosophy of *New Public Management*, the logic of the market sector also gained a grip on activities in the public sector.

people who launch their 'own business'. This expansion is partly attributable to the increase in the number of self-employed. More and more Dutch citizens are starting their own companies. This could be related to a new phase that capitalism has entered since the 1980s, one characterised by the fact that sectors previously organised in a collective manner are increasingly operating as a market. The corresponding expansion of entrepreneurship has also left its mark on social initiatives; the principles of professional and enterprising activity are increasingly implemented to realise public values or objectives.

A second circumstance is the sharp increase in political dissatisfaction. The workings of Dutch parliamentary democracy ensure that there is often a great difference between what politicians do and the preferences of the public. We revisit this point in chapter 11 and limit ourselves here to the remark that this problem also arises at the local level. As a result, communications between municipalities and enterprising citizens are often anything but smooth. This is all the more distressing for those who are at the forefront of a social initiative and who are not just acting in their own interests. The issue can also be formulated in another manner: it is no longer only the state and its professionals that are able to organise public affairs.⁴³ It is increasingly the business of citizens themselves and primarily of those who make an extra effort, who devote time and effort to social purposes or who employ their talents to contribute to the common interest. Many citizens wish to do this themselves, in cooperation with others and in their immediate social environment. In this way, citizens rediscover the ethical and moral facets of politics. It is increasingly clear, especially at the local and regional levels, that the rules and procedures of formal democracy are no longer sufficient. Anyone wishing to expose a problem or achieve something in a positive sense must clearly indicate what he or she stands for. This has proven to be one of the principal success factors for new social initiatives.

9 An old *and* modern phenomenon

Although social initiatives are currently undergoing certain changes, they have a longer history, just as volunteer work and development aid do. According to Tine de Moor, contemporary social initiatives constitute the most recent step in a tradition that has existed for many centuries. She

43 Cf. Frissen 2013.

distinguishes three waves of 'collective action' in which society looks for an answer to the negative effects of economic innovation.⁴⁴

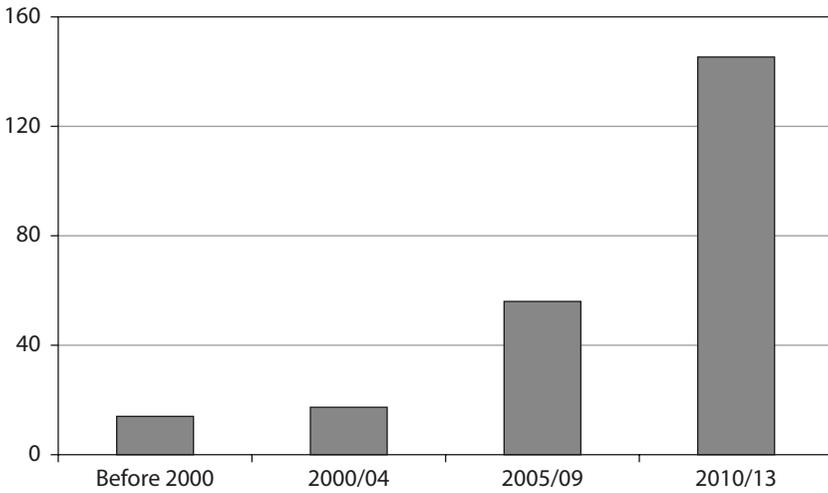
The first wave occurred in the Late Middle Ages, when artisans were confronted with the negative consequences of an urbanised economy. They began to organise themselves into merchant guilds and later into craft guilds in order to put pressure on those in power. Occupational groups were able to establish quality and price agreements. The common use of fields by farmers and the creation of water management boards date from the same period. Although these forms of collective association continued to exist for a long time, the wave of liberalisation at the end of the eighteenth century gave rise to a strong tendency toward private ownership. The liberal regime that followed remained in power for a long time and ensured that a market economy flourished in various sectors of Dutch society. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this brought about not only an acceleration in processes such as industrialisation and urbanisation but also an increase in social conflict. In response to the negative effects of this regime, a second wave of collective action emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ Various cooperatives that continue to play a role today – such as Rabobank, Friesland Campina and Achmea – stem from this second wave.

The third wave of social initiatives, now manifesting itself in the Netherlands and other countries, had already begun prior to the economic crisis of 2008. It was a reaction to the privatisation of public assets that, partly at the instigation of the European Union, has been undertaken since the 1980s. The current wave is, hence, not so much a reaction to the consequences of the economic crisis or a response to the cuts in the welfare state that the government wishes to impose. It is first and foremost a reaction to the efforts of liberalisation that were implemented in the preceding decades. Dutch society has gone through a period in which private property and market processes were propagated everywhere, just as in the nineteenth century. This has done much good but also generated a number of excesses and deficiencies. For this reason, and just as in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, numerous social initiatives have emerged in response to the negative effects of this privatisation drive. Although these initiatives are

44 The historical perspective is taken from De Moor 2013.

45 Tine de Moor therefore notes the following: 'New institutions for collective action came into being around 1880 aimed at the collective organisation of production in cooperatives, services in guarantee funds, as well as producers and workers into business associations and trade unions. Additionally, this was a period of growth for new (official) organisations not directed at economic but rather cultural and sports objectives' (De Moor 2013, p. 17).

Graph 9.2 Number of social initiatives per five-year period (compiled in the summer of 2013)



part of a long tradition, they are thoroughly connected to modern society.⁴⁶ There is no reason to assume that they primarily involve smaller localities or the countryside. It is precisely in the larger cities that they are doing relatively well. While the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht and Eindhoven together contain 15 percent of the Dutch population, they account for 33 percent of the initiatives. This emphasises the fact that such initiatives mainly thrive in urban environments.

As for the range of social initiatives, it has become apparent over time that nearly all existing initiatives were begun very recently. The start date of 70 cases remains unknown, and 31 other cases have a lifespan of ten years or more. Graph 9.2. shows that by far the greatest number of initiatives date from the years following 2005. The largest number are, in fact, from the last three years (N=145). There may be distortions in the gathered data, given that we searched for these initiatives on the web and given that older initiatives may be less visible as a result. But this does not affect De Moor's observation that these new forms of collective action have increased substantially since 2005.⁴⁷

46 We counted in total 339 instances in which the initiative had a geographic location. In 14 cases, the location of the initiative remained unknown, while in 12 cases, there was significance that extended beyond the local level. In total, 115 different locations were indicated, varying from Amsterdam to Wissenkerke.

47 Van de Wijdeven 2012, p. 285-321 and Verhoeven 2009, p. 21-88.

If we look at who the people behind these initiatives are, it turns out that they are primarily private citizens: they are responsible for no fewer than 62 percent of all initiatives. It is seldom the case that an initiative is launched by governments or organisations associated with civil society. Professionals and entrepreneurs also support these types of projects (respectively 16 and 14 percent of the initiatives). This skewed distribution is partly the result of our search method. In compiling our list, we deliberately selected projects initiated from within society. It is to be expected then, that private citizens have a large involvement. Nevertheless, our findings certainly emphasise the fact that the number of social entrepreneurs has grown strongly in recent years.

10 Conclusions

However inappropriate it may be to lump together phenomena such as support for development aid, volunteer work and social initiatives, they all have a few things in common.

First, it is important to note that they do not involve anything new but are activities that were undertaken in earlier times. Volunteering has a long tradition in the Netherlands running back to the pre-modern age. This tradition does not appear to have been undermined by the process of modernisation. On the contrary, the percentage of Dutch residents active as volunteers or donors has increased over the past decades. Support for environmental and nature-related organisations has even experienced what we might call a dramatic upsurge. As a result, the Netherlands is now one of the leading European countries in this field. Although the support for development aid is of a more recent date, it still has a history going back at least one hundred years. A century ago, efforts were made to do something about the poor conditions in the Dutch colonies through a mix of education, activity and preaching. Fifty years ago, many Dutch citizens devoted themselves to efforts in defence of human rights and economic development in Third World Countries. And today, they give their support to projects dedicated to fair trade and equal relations. All these are forms of moral commitment that have not been significantly undermined by the process of modernisation. The same applies to the social initiatives that have come to life over the last ten years. They are a response to the practice of privatising public assets, a trend that has become increasingly stronger since the 1980s and that has aroused the inevitable opposition. However, this phenomenon is also not something entirely new. It belongs to a long tradition going back to the Middle Ages in which members of society defend their collective interests.

All this points to the continued existence of moral values, which appear to be immune to the process of modernisation. But that is not all. The real reason for these initiatives is precisely to compensate or combat certain shortcomings of modern life. Volunteers offer help to people who have become isolated due to such tendencies as individualisation or upscaling. Organisations for nature conservation or animal rights are meant to be a correction to the unbridled pursuit of economic growth and the price we pay for it in ecological terms. The intention of development aid is to provide support to countries or groups that have very weak positions in the world economy. There are explicit moral values at stake in all this. The fact that there is much to find fault with concerning the effectiveness and professionalism of development aid is not inconsistent with the fact that many Dutch people are genuinely concerned about their fellow human beings in other parts of the world. It is not without reason that such words as justice, responsibility and fairness are in frequent use. And finally, the more recent forms of social initiatives may be regarded as social or moral corrections. They are opposed to the impersonal and formal manner in which Dutch democracy deals with the public good. What they promote anew are social ideals and moral engagement, elements that came under pressure due to the hegemony of (neo-)liberal ideas. Viewed in this way, these phenomena not only demonstrate that moral values in modern society live on, they also counteract the effects of modernisation that come into conflict with these values.

Meanwhile, modern society does have a significant influence on the form that such a correction takes. In terms of content, we see that pre-modern ideals, values and principles are often invoked to counteract certain shortcomings of modern life. However, if we look at the initiators, the resources or the organisational forms of these corrective actions, it is striking just how modern they are. We noted that the increase in volunteer work in the Netherlands is primarily related to the number of highly educated citizens with a strong need for self-development, as is the rise in financial support of idealist organisations. Even development aid is increasingly switching to using modern procedures and working methods. The age of missionaries is truly over, but the same is true of the organisations from the second half of the twentieth century that operated as collectives. Today, we see that people make a conscious decision to commit themselves to private initiatives by the persons and communities involved. That is particularly true of the many social initiatives that we mentioned: they are born out of a new form of social entrepreneurship and make extensive use of social media or other modern means of communication. Many of these initiatives were

started by highly educated people who like to utilise innovation to promote public interests. As such, the phenomena discussed here represent a mixed reality insofar as they often involve a modern formulation of pre-modern content. While this may be paradoxical from a philosophical perspective, in the historical reality it constitutes the very power of these phenomena.

Finally, these attempts to correct or compensate for a modern dynamic are also mixed in the sense that they are never a matter of 'pure' morality. What we have outlined in this chapter is far removed from the self-sacrifice that used to be propagated in certain hagiographies. It also has little to do with the ideas on social and political utopias from before World War II. The same can be said of the countless ideal models contrived by philosophers and moralists. What we have here is an everyday form of morality in which care for others and looking after one's self-interest are readily combined in practice. Dutch volunteers say more or less the same thing. They help someone because it is needed, but also because they find it interesting or because it is good for their CVs. Others spend a lot of time, money and energy on those who are disadvantaged or in need, but they also want their efforts to be recognised in public. Citizens who encounter each other in a social initiative certainly have public values in mind but they also appreciate the warmth and safety of a local community. This brings us back to an idea articulated by Adam Smith when he pointed out that moral sentiments do not do their work through the construction of a philosophical system but through the lives of ordinary citizens.⁴⁸ Well over 250 years later, this insight seems more relevant than ever.

48 That is why Part VII of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is devoted entirely to the rejection of systems of moral philosophy (p. 242-314).

10 Europe and modern morality

Gabriël van den Brink

We can imagine that some readers have now lost track of things. We began this book by asking a simple question: how are modernity and morality interrelated? Up to this point, we have turned everything upside down without coming up with a convincing answer. Hopefully, it is at least clear that a number of accepted ideas about the relationship are not at all tenable, such as the idea that modernisation always results in an erosion of moral values, or the opposite idea that modern societies are morally superior to more traditional societies. We saw that the work of modern professionals does not automatically preclude the cultivation of moral values. However, it was also noted that the public realm and moral commitment are not necessarily in alignment. In the following chapter, we try to bring some order to this mishmash of observations. This chapter has the more modest task of sketching the position that the Netherlands occupies in comparison to other European countries.

For such a comparison, it is useful to recall the forms of moral commitment identified at the end of chapter 2. We maintained that the evolution of moral sentiments has gone through two developments. The first is that the circle in which moral sentiments were shaped gradually expanded. While that circle did not initially extend beyond the local community or city, moral sensitivity took on a national form in the course of the nineteenth century, only to develop subsequently into a sentiment that in theory can be mobilised on a global scale. This development is shown in figure 10.1, which makes a distinction between the micro, meso and macro levels. The second development is that moral values also evolved in terms of content. While values were initially affiliated with the sacred register, with the progress of modernisation the register of social values was added, and in the last quarter of the twentieth century more vital values emerged. The combination of both developments yields the nine different forms of moral commitment shown in figure 10.1.¹ As a result, moral sentiments may alternatively

¹ Although the content of figure 10.1 coincides with figure 2.1, the rows for 'social values' and 'sacred values' have switched places. The reason for this is that chapter 2 assumes an 'archaeological' view, while this chapter adopts a 'genealogical' view. In an archaeological analysis, human existence is conceived as a stack of layers (sedimentation), where the oldest layer is the deepest and the more recent layers are on top. It is for this reason that from an archaeological viewpoint, we start with vital values related to human nature, then the sacred

relate to such fields as spirituality, democracy, humanity, brotherhood, professional life, society as a whole, intimate life, lifestyle and experiencing nature or naturalism. These topics will be discussed in sections 1 to 8. Obviously, these values do not have equal weight in all European countries. Generally, the moral sensitivity of a traditionally oriented population is mainly concerned with such fields as brotherhood or spirituality, while the morality of a modern population will also extend to other fields. The challenge is to empirically demonstrate this divergence. To do this, nine variables were selected from the European Values Study (EVS) to indicate the attitudes of respondents in various countries with regard to these fields.

Figure 10.1 Expansion of moral sensitivity: nine forms of commitment

	Micro	Meso	Macro
Sacred	Spirituality	Democracy	Humanity
Social	Brotherhood	Professionalism	Society
Vital	Intimacy	Lifestyles	Naturalism

We must admit, however, that we were unable to fill in each field to the extent that we would have wanted. For attitudes to professionalism or spirituality, the EVS contains more than enough variables, but the issue is more problematic for other fields, where we must make do with just a few variables. Nonetheless, we use these variables to determine the score of the

values of religious traditions, and end with the social values of modern society. A genealogical analysis, however, focuses on how the relevant values follow one another in the course of our cultural history. In this genealogical history, sacred values should be first – in Europe, they are mainly related to Christianity. Then there were mainly social values – a development that began in the eighteenth century and continued far into the twentieth century. Finally, more vital values came to light – a process that has only just begun. In terms of moral commitment, all this makes little difference. We therefore use the same keywords.

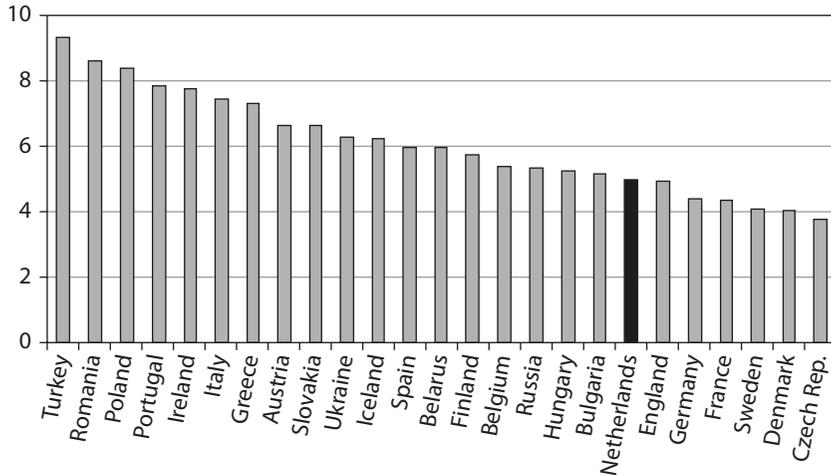
various European countries with regard to each field and compare this to the position occupied by the Netherlands.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the results, we would note that the following analysis is intended to clarify four issues. First, we wish to determine the *level of the valuation* for a given item. Since the results of the EVS are usually expressed in a scale, it is important to know what the average value is. For example, there is quite a difference whether the respondents averaged a score of 1.7 or 8.2 on a scale from 1 (= totally reprehensible) to 10 (= very acceptable) in their condemnation of tax fraud. In the one case, we are dealing with a low level of tolerance (Europeans reject tax fraud) and in the other case with a high level (Europeans are not bothered by tax fraud). Second, we wish to determine the size of the *variation among European countries*. On certain points (e.g. the significance that respondents ascribe to their family life) the responses hardly vary, but quite strong contrasts are revealed in other matters (for example, the statement that euthanasia is never acceptable). Our interest focuses primarily on topics that show a substantial variation. Third, we determine the *position occupied by the Netherlands* within this variation by means of a ranking. We especially want to know if Dutch respondents are at the top of a certain scale, at the bottom of it or if they come somewhere in the middle. Fourth, we consider the extent to which countries with a comparable ranking *can be clustered*. Can we identify certain European regions or zones in which countries have the same profile? If so, to which zone or region can the Netherlands be assigned?

1 Spirituality

Let us begin by investigating the position that the Netherlands occupies in the European context with regard to the most traditional form of moral commitment. To what extent do Dutch citizens believe in God, and what significance do they attribute to religious life?

In general, the results of the EVS confirm the notion that the Netherlands is a secularised society. Take the score of belief in God (no graph). Although the average score for Europe is fairly high (7.8), there are substantial differences between the various countries. In countries such as Turkey, Poland, Romania, Portugal, Italy and Greece, the score is higher than 9. At the other end of the spectrum, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands have scores below 6. The same pattern appears when respondents are asked about the extent to which God is important in their lives (see graph 10.1). The highest scores are observed in the south and east of Europe (higher than 7), while the

Graph 10.1 How important is God in your life?

Note: Data derived from EVS 2008, in which the score of 1 stands for 'entirely unimportant' and the score of 10 for 'extremely important' (variable F063). The average score was 6.07.

Netherlands, England, Germany, France, Sweden and Denmark all remain below a score of 5. The EVS also looked at the extent to which people derive strength and comfort from their faith. Although the European average of 5.9 hides considerable differences, we find roughly the same geographical distribution as in the previous questions. One end of the spectrum consists primarily of south-eastern countries, such as Turkey, Romania, Poland and Greece, where the score is higher than 7; while the other end is occupied by a group of north-western countries such as Germany, England, France, Sweden and Denmark, where faith provides less consolation. The Netherlands belongs to the latter group and with a score of 4.2 is under the European average. In other words, the Netherlands belongs to the less religious side of the European spectrum, although it cannot be said that belief in God has disappeared.

Nevertheless, the relationship between modernisation and faith proves to be less unequivocal than is often claimed. For example, it is noteworthy that many Europeans do not wish to abandon their belief in life after death. Despite noticeable differences, it is not clear whether the divergence can be associated with modernisation. With a score of 7.8, the mostly modern-thinking Icelanders strongly believe in an after-life, while the inhabitants of several former communist states like the Russians, Czechs, Hungarians and Bulgarians believe much less in life after death. With a score of 5.1, the Netherlands is positioned in the middle of the scale. What exactly do people believe in terms

of life after death? Although many Europeans retain some notion of heaven (average score 4.9), their views are rather divergent. There are countries where the belief in heaven is absolutely not subject to discussion, while other countries are less sure of the existence of heaven. The Netherlands belongs to the latter group and, with a score of 3.7, remains below the European average. An important effect of modernisation appears to be that less significance is attributed to the 'strict' sides of faith. This includes the notion of sin, which has played a central role for ages. The south and east of Europe adheres to the idea of human sinfulness, while this faith has been considerably undermined in the northwest region. The Netherlands (3.9) belongs unambiguously to the latter group and scores far below the European average on the notion of sin (6.4).² We find a similar distribution in the responses to the question concerning belief in hell. Hell remains quite popular in southeast Europe, but there is no question of this in the north-west region.³ The low score of 1.4 in the Netherlands indicates that only a few Dutch people hang on to a belief in hell.

2 Belief in democracy

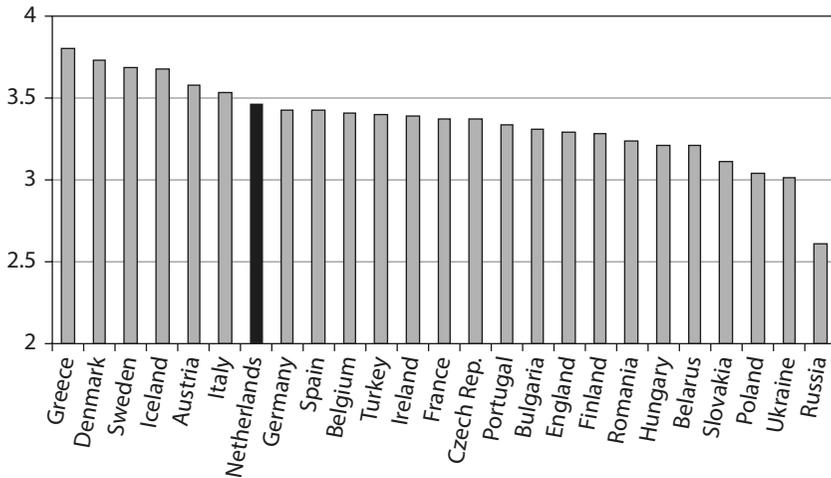
In the traditional situation, moral values were formed within religion. It was the believers who were able to confront others about such values, and it was the native religious tradition that maintained these values. This began to change when the community moved to a higher scale, such as a large city or a nation-state. At this level, people inevitably encounter others who pray to a different God or perhaps even deny the existence of a God. To be able to apply moral sentiments to such people as well, another form of commitment was required. This could involve a focus on democratic society, or a sacred respect for the rule of law or for the principles of parliamentary decision-making.⁴ What does the map of Europe look like in this respect? And where is the Netherlands positioned?

Europeans, it must be acknowledged, generally have little interest in politics. Compared with other areas of life such as work or the family, political affairs scores substantially low. On a scale of 1 (= entirely unimportant) to 4 (= extremely important), the European average is 2.17. Apart from politics in a general sense, the EVS explored how democracy is regarded in

2 Turkey, Romania, Poland Ireland and Slovakia score higher than 0.75, while Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Sweden and Denmark score 0.44 or less.

3 Southeast Europe scores 0.4 or more, north-west Europe 0.2 or less.

4 Borgman et al. 2006.

Graph 10.2 Democracy as a political system

Note: Data derived from EVS 2008, in which the score of 1 refers to an evaluation of 'very bad' and the score of 4 to an evaluation of 'very good' (variable E117). The average score was 3.34.

European countries (see Graph 10.2). This is especially interesting because some countries can look back on a venerable democratic tradition, while others experienced dictatorships just a few decades ago. The latter group includes countries that were freed from communism after the fall of the Wall in 1989, but also Spain, Portugal and Greece, which were subject to military dictatorships until the mid-1970s. We see that the average valuation of democracy is relatively strong in Europe, with a score of 3.34 on a 4-point scale. At the same time, there is little variation between countries; actually, only Russia continues to score well below the average at 2.61. Although the northwest region has a number of high scores (Iceland, Sweden, Denmark), we also see this in Greece. While low scores are concentrated in the south-east region, they are also evident in Finland and England. With a score of 3.45, the Netherlands is slightly above the European average.

Respondents were also asked how satisfied they were with the way democracy was developing in their country. On this point, more variation emerges, although we would note that the average score of 2.36 is lower than in the previous question. The variation displays, however, a clear tendency. Dissatisfaction with the development of democracy is most strongly pronounced in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. Such discontent is particularly evident in Belarus, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine and Russia, where scores were less than 2.20. With a score of 1.76, Turkey

also belongs to this group. Greater satisfaction with the development of democracy is found in the northwest region, where scores were above 2.63. The Netherlands also belongs to this latter group and, with a score of 2.78, appears to be very satisfied with the way democracy is functioning. Other indicators such as the delegation of political decisions to experts or rejection of a military dictatorship depict a similar picture. The Netherlands, Iceland and Denmark adopt strongly democratic attitudes, while Turkey, Poland, Romania and Belarus lean towards undemocratic solutions.

A democratic preference or satisfaction with the development of democracy does not mean that citizens participate in political affairs in large numbers. On the contrary, active participation is rather low throughout Europe. This is clear from the fact that only a modest share of the respondents belong to a political party. The European average is no more than 0.05 on a scale between 0 and 1. The distribution is quite skewed: the vast majority of countries score lower than the average, while only a small group of countries achieve a score of more than 0.08. This latter group consists of Iceland, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands. If we look at the extent to which citizens work as volunteers for a political party, the European average does not exceed 0.02. Here we are confronted with the paradoxical situation that Europeans generally appreciate democracy and democratic politics but are themselves hardly politically engaged within existing institutions.⁵ One would expect a broader definition of 'political participation' to result in a more favourable picture, but this is not the case. Even if, for example, membership in a local political group (instead of a party) is considered, the scores are still not much higher.

A more plausible interpretation is that citizens realise their democratic ambitions in other manners. They are, in fact, interested in public affairs but much less in established institutions. Those opting for a professional career in government or politics would eagerly become a member of a political party, but such membership is less relevant to ordinary citizens. They opt for alternative forms of political action that have been developed in recent decades, such as holding demonstrations, organising boycotts, signing petitions or undertaking tougher actions (wildcat strikes, factory occupations). These types of activities have proven to be very popular in Europe. When, for example, citizens are asked if they are willing to sign a petition, then the average on a scale from 1 (= I would never do so) and 3 (= I have done so) is 2.15. The scores reveal an interesting geographic distribution: there is a contrast between the countries of the former Eastern Bloc and the northwest region, with the highest scores in Sweden, England, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. Other forms of

5 Van den Brink 2002, p. 57-62.

extra-parliamentary action are less popular but display a similar distribution across countries. Participation in legal and illegal demonstrations enjoys greater popularity in northwest Europe than in the southeast region.⁶ Organising boycott campaigns appears to be an entirely northwest European speciality, the highest scores being registered in Sweden, Iceland, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and England, while Romania, Russia, Hungary, Belarus, Poland, Greece, Ukraine and Bulgaria bring up the rear.

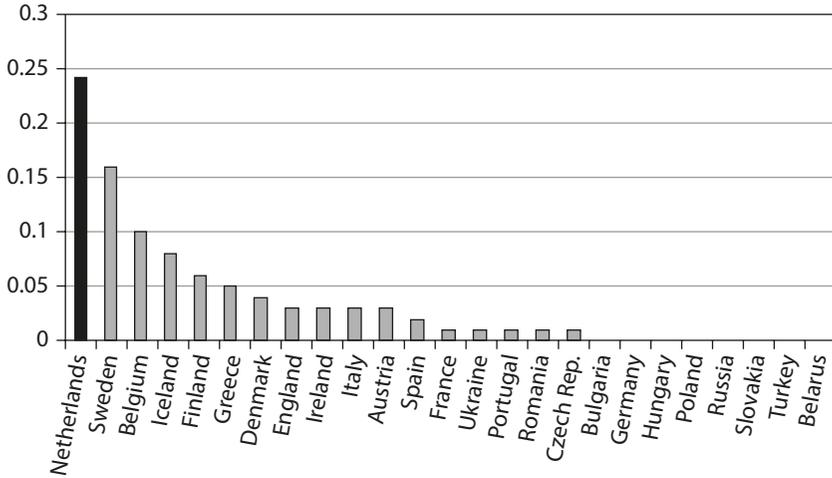
All in all, the picture is quite clear. Assuming that commitment to the public good is indeed reflected in a greater appreciation for democratic politics, greater participation in political organisations and more participation of citizens in extra-parliamentary activities, we can see that such commitment is the most developed in Iceland, Ireland, Greece, Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark. With the exception of Greece, these countries belong to the northwest region and, in most cases, look back at a long democratic tradition. The opposite is the case in the southeast region. In countries such as Turkey, Ukraine, Poland, Russia, Hungary, Romania and Belarus, the residents have less appreciation for the development of democracy, less interest in politics, are less frequently members of political organisations and are less involved in extra-parliamentary activities. The Netherlands occupies a prominent place in this hierarchy and is only surpassed by Denmark. It is therefore not astonishing that the Netherlands obtains a high to very high score on nearly all the items discussed here. There is only one exception: the desire for strong leadership. In general, this desire decreases the more developed a country's democracy is. The Netherlands appears to be an anomaly in this regard: although the country undeniably belongs to the democratic vanguard, it is ranked in the middle in terms of the call for strong leadership.

3 Human dignity

We noted that, outside the circle of their own faith, the moral commitment of people presupposes an identification with democratic values. In an analogous manner, doing something for people who might not be democratic requires an even further enlargement of one's moral commitment. This is what happens when citizens are sensitive to the suffering of their fellow human beings elsewhere in the world. In times of war or natural disasters, people do not always ask themselves whether the political regime of the concerned country

6 Noteworthy exceptions in this respect are Greece (where demonstrations are very popular) and England (which is relatively reticent precisely when it comes to this type of activity).

Graph 10.3 Membership in a human rights organisation



Note: Data derived from EVS 2008. A score of 1 indicates that someone is a member of an organisation promoting human rights and a score of 0 indicates that this is not the case (variable A070). The European average is 0.03.

passes the test. At such moments, people believe there are certain values that transcend political life and are relevant for all people. We are alluding to the notion of human dignity and the commitment of people to an organisation or association seeking to alleviate human suffering, to defend human rights or to promote world peace. In previous chapters, we linked this type of commitment to donorship, but it is clear that this category is actually much broader. It not only involves people who contribute to such initiatives in a financial sense but also people who work as volunteers for these organisations. Fortunately, the EVS includes a number of questions enabling us to determine the level of this support in a number of European countries. First, let us examine the degree to which the peace movement is supported. Although the heyday of this movement is already long gone, there are still many citizens in various countries working for peace. In most countries for which data is available, the level of participation is around the average for Europe, but there are two countries that stand out clearly above the rest: the Netherlands and Greece. If we look at the share of the population performing volunteer work for peace, Greece occupies the top position. Greece also stands out when it comes to defending human rights. In terms of membership in human rights organisations (see Graph 10.3), Denmark, Greece, Finland, Iceland, Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands score above the European average of 0.03, with the Netherlands standing far ahead of the others with a score of 0.24.

4 Social involvement

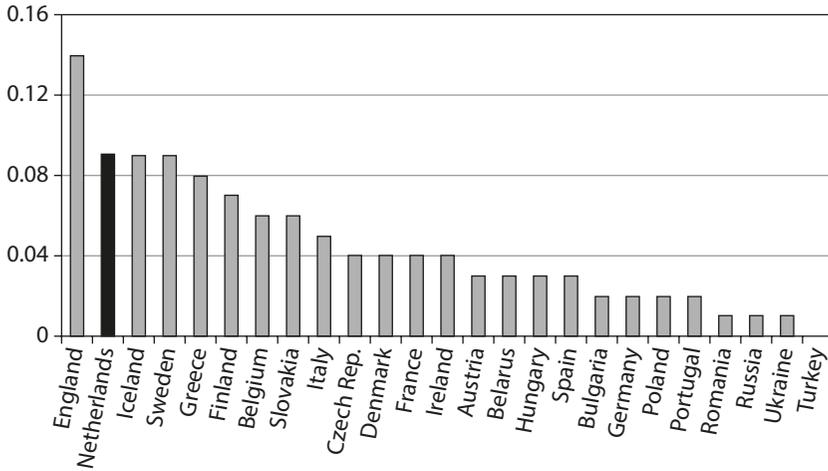
The concept of brotherhood refers to a traditional form of altruistic behaviour that involves supporting or caring for people whom we know personally. Earlier chapters have shown that this form of support has a long tradition in Western Europe. It existed as long ago as the Middle Ages and continues to exist today. One may call it a practical form of love for one's neighbour, although it is also practised by non-Christians. After all, brotherhood also refers to the forms of mutual support that developed in the early days of socialism. The same also applies to the various forms of volunteer work familiar to us in the present. The decisive factor is that a person devotes oneself to a group of fellow human beings who need specific help (or belongs to an association that provides that kind of help).

Looking at the results of the EVS from this perspective, we notice that the Netherlands has a very distinctive profile. This is not apparent when we look at generalities, such as whether people are willing to help their neighbours. The Netherlands' distinctiveness only becomes clear when specific behaviours are examined, for example, the share of the population that belongs to an organisation looking after the welfare of the elderly. The Netherlands has a leading position in this category. The other countries where these organisations are widely supported, such as Sweden, Iceland, Finland and Belgium, all belong to the northwest region. There is a similar distinction when it comes to volunteer work for the elderly, the disabled or disadvantaged persons (see Graph 10.4). Incidentally, this help does not have to be limited to people with problems. Mutual support and cooperation can also take the form of activities in the artistic or cultural field. This type of reciprocity is, in general, more popular than the other types of volunteer work, as is evident from the average score for Europe (0.10). Scores of 0.15 or higher are found in Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Belgium, Greece, Sweden and the Netherlands. With an admirable score of 0.45, the Netherlands tops this list. This demonstrates that a huge number of people are involved in organising artistic, musical, educational or cultural activities.⁷ All this indicates a high degree of mutual commitment, albeit linked to specific purposes and therefore to a circle of people with a specific interest.⁸

7 Van den Berg et al. 2008a, p. 68-86.

8 There is a high degree of similarity with the image of people who undertake volunteer work in this context. The percentage of people who are members of such an organisation is, of course, higher than the percentage of those who carry out unpaid work, but the Netherlands also holds first place in this regard. While the average score in Europe is 0.05, the scores for the Netherlands lies significantly above the average at 0.17.

Graph 10.4 Volunteer work for the elderly, the disabled and the like



Note: Data derived from EVS 2008. A score of 1 indicates that the person performs volunteer work for the elderly or the disabled, and a score of 0 indicates that this is not the case (variable A081). The average score was 0.04.

5 Professional life

As we have already seen on a few occasions, work in modern society involves much more than simply earning an income. It is also a way for citizens to develop themselves, to realise certain ideals, to help other people or to improve society. This ideal quality of work has become more important in recent decades. According to Ronald Inglehart, there has been a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation for labour.⁹ This section will deal with the issue by asking whether such a shift is, in fact, happening in Europe and what position the Netherlands occupies in this context.

It is evident that, generally speaking, the residents of Europe attribute a great deal of significance to work: the average score is 3.45 on a scale of 4. The only life domain that scores higher is family life. It also turns out that there is little variation between countries and that not a single European country scores below 3.0. Despite this fact, 'hard work' is not very well appreciated in the Netherlands. The Netherlands, along with Sweden, England, Finland and Denmark, belongs to a group of countries that allocate relatively high value to leisure. The Dutch occupy the second highest

9 See chapter 6, section 9.

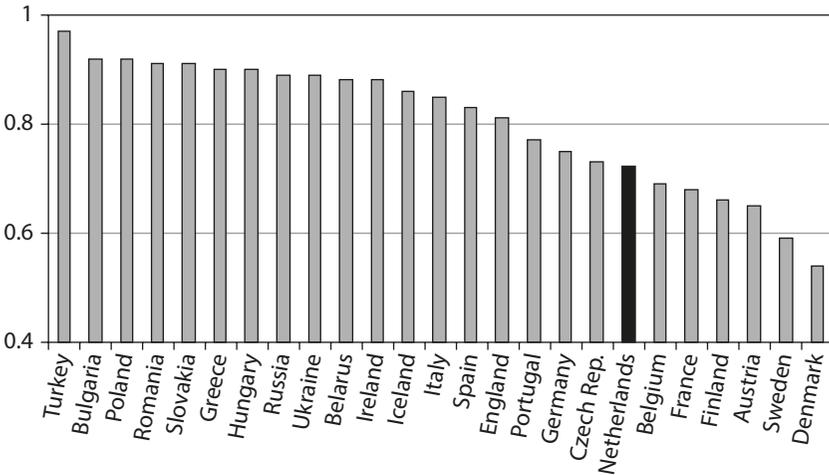
position in Europe on this point. The result therefore indicates that Dutch residents do not attribute absolute priority to work (compared with residents of other countries, of course). Evidently, the level of prosperity and security in the Netherlands is so high that values such as hard work and devotion to duty are somewhat downplayed. There are other indications that support this assumption. Take, for example, the view that work represents a duty towards society. We see that the Netherlands and England have the least affinity for this position, while there are other countries where the view is strongly endorsed. The traditional work ethic is mainly encountered in less prosperous countries such as Romania, Portugal or Turkey.

In general, extrinsic motivations score relatively high in traditional societies, while modern countries often show a high score on intrinsic motivations. The question regarding the importance of pay reflects this (Graph 10.5). In countries where the agricultural and industrial sectors offer many employment opportunities, the respondents find good pay to be extremely important. This applies to countries in the southeast, such as Turkey, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary and Romania, where scores are 0.9 or higher on scale of 0 to 1. The situation is different in northwest European countries such as Sweden or Denmark, where scores do not exceed 0.6. The Netherlands has a below-average score of 0.72. Apparently, a good salary is not an overly high priority for Dutch respondents. This also applies to other characteristics related to old-style work, such as job security. In relatively poor countries, people consider it extremely important that a job provides sufficient security. They attribute a score of 0.81 or more to this factor, while the European average is 0.66. Dutch residents are at the other end of the scale at 0.28. They do not care about suitable working hours either. The Netherlands scores 0.38 on this point, while the average is 0.52 and Hungary and Turkey top the ranking with scores of 0.80 and 0.93.¹⁰ Finally, the Dutch population is quite bothered by heavy workloads. Those looking for hard workers would do better to consider Turks and Poles because their scores are respectively 0.64 or 0.91. Dutch workers have a score of 0.33, just under the European average. It is little consolation that some countries have even less appreciation for a heavy workload, such as Denmark or France.

In other words, in terms of ambition, performance or work effort, the Dutch do not appear to be the ideal workers. They belong at best to the European average, but in fact they regularly fall below average. It would seem rather overexaggerated to qualify work in the Netherlands as an object

10 Differences are less marked insofar as the preference for a long holiday is concerned: the Netherlands scores 0.28 on this point, while the average is 0.32.

Graph 10.5 Important in a job: good pay



Note: Data derived from EVS 2008. A score of 1 refers to respondents who think good pay is important and a score of 0 refers to respondents for whom it is not important (variable C011). The average score was 0.81.

of commitment. However, it may also be the case that the commitment is related to another dimension. It might not manifest itself as a willingness to work hard, to chase after a promotion or to gain social status. The traditional employee position based on a nice salary and fixed working hours is just as unappealing. What we suspect is that this commitment is much stronger in the subjective sphere, i.e. the personal or interpersonal aspects of work.¹¹ This is supported by a few results from the EVS and is consistent with the findings reported in chapter 7.

What do we need to consider when it comes to these personal factors? To begin with, Dutch people appreciate it when they can use their own skills in their work. At 0.68, the Netherlands has a score above the European average in this regard. Additionally, Dutch workers find it important to be able to use their initiative in their jobs. Here again, their score of 0.62 is above average. They also place a strong emphasis on relational elements, as can be seen from their responses to the question how important it is for them to meet people in their job. While the average score in Europe is 0.50, the Netherlands is above average with a score of 0.61. On this point, they occupy fourth place in the ranking. Still, the clearest indication can be found in

¹¹ This is also reflected in recent research into the factors that contemporary professionals believe are important with regard to their work. For an overview, see Jansen et al. 2009.

the question relating to the importance of having pleasant people to work with. Even assuming that most Europeans consider having nice colleagues to be fairly important in a job (the European average score is 0.72), the Dutch score of 0.89 is still prominently above the rest. Our provisional conclusion is therefore that the Netherlands, in comparison with other countries, attaches a great deal of value to the personal and interpersonal facets of work. In any case, they are held to be more important than the material qualities of a job.

6 Civic life

Similar to religious values, one can also distinguish multiple levels of scale in the register of social values. In this case, other forms of moral engagement are involved. The way we look after a disabled or elderly person requiring care is different from the way we interact with colleagues at work. Nevertheless, it would be improper to label the first form as better or more authentic than the second. Characteristic of modern society is precisely the fact that different domains also entail different sensitivities. It is therefore not surprising that, with a further broadening of the social horizon, other values are raised. The aforementioned forms of mutual support or reciprocity take place in a circle of people who you know personally or with whom you work as a colleague. In the next step, it is citizenship that comes into scope. The issue then involves how I relate to people who I do not know personally or whose interests I do not share. The only thing that we have in common is our obligation to treat each other as equal participants in public life. This form of reciprocity, however, takes a more abstract form.¹² It is important that citizenship has both a 'vertical' and a 'horizontal' dimension. The vertical dimension pertains to the way a citizen relates to the state and government. The horizontal involves how one interacts with one's fellow citizens. Although both dimensions are present in every society, it is evident that in their conception of 'citizenship', the Dutch have a preference for the horizontal facet.¹³

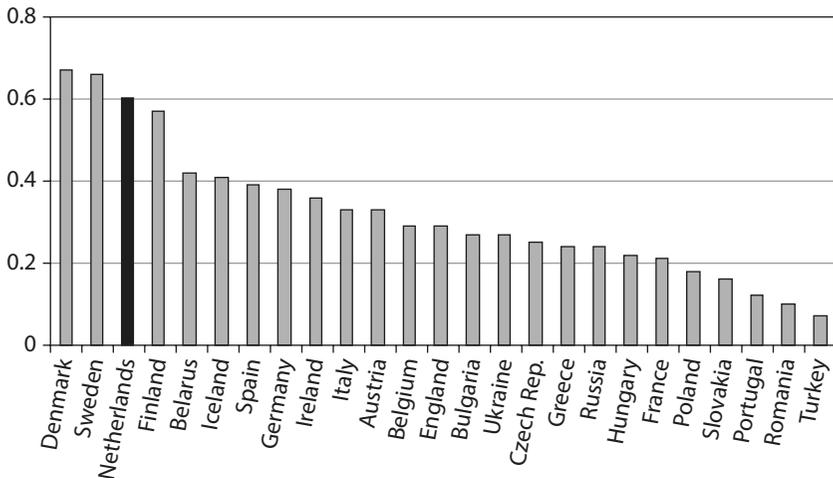
Having said this, we identify a number of variables in the EVS that operationalise citizenship. Just as in preceding sections, our preference is for specific items. For example, how is smoking in public spaces regarded? This question is both specific and relevant. On the one hand, smoking belongs to the realm of personal choice (one person smokes, the other does not),

12 Van Gunsteren 1992, Kymlicka & Norman 1995, Beiner 1995, Schudson 1998, Norris et al. 1999, Van den Brink 2002.

13 Dekker 2005, p. 72-80.

but an interesting problem arises once smokers and non-smokers share the same space. Who should behave with consideration to whom? Citizenship implies that smokers restrain themselves because a non-smoker may be affected by the behaviour of a smoker, while the inverse is not the case. The results show that Europe can substantially improve in this respect. In response to the question of whether smoking is acceptable in public spaces, the average score is, in fact, 3.46. Evidently, the public does not impose any strict norm on this behaviour. This also applies in the Netherlands, whose score of 3.77 indicates that it remains rather tolerant. Somewhat stricter is the opinion pertaining to the acceptability of tax fraud. Europeans are even stricter when it comes to speeding on public roads. On a scale from 1 to 10, the average European score of 2.30 already displays intolerance for such behaviour, but the score in the Netherlands of 1.81 is even lower and occupies the second most stringent viewpoint in this regard. Then comes the extent to which it is acceptable for someone to take bribes. Due to the average score of 1.79 on a 10-point scale, one can deduce that by far the majority of countries reject such behaviour. There is little apparent variation on this point, although it turns out that some countries, such as Ukraine, France, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Belarus, are more flexible. The Netherlands has a below-average score of 1.56. Finally, the EVS also explored whether European respondents felt driving under the influence of alcohol was acceptable. Again, this is an interesting indicator for citizenship because motorists who take to the road after a few glasses do not take into consideration the interests of their fellow citizens. The average European holds a fairly harsh view, as demonstrated by the average score of 1.52. The Netherlands adopts an even harder line with a score of 1.43.

Two things can be concluded from this data. First, it appears that anyone causing harm to the public good (tax fraud, bribes) or to fellow citizens (speeding, driving under the influence) cannot count on much sympathy. The scores are generally on the severe side. Second, the Netherlands scores below the European average on three of the five variables discussed below and therefore displays little tolerance in comparison to other countries. None of the above alters the fact that Dutch citizens have a relatively great deal of trust in each other. We can explain this phenomenon using the theory that Robert Putnam has formulated about social capital and social cohesion. In a study of citizen participation, he noted large differences between the north and south of Italy. The north is distinctive due to the fact that the citizens there tend to have multiple memberships in associations, as they maintain a strong network of informal contacts and have a great deal of mutual trust. In the south, association life is much more weakly developed,

Graph 10.6 Most people can be trusted

Note: Data derived from EVS 2008. Respondents were asked whether they thought most people could be trusted (variable A165). A score of 1 corresponds to a yes and a score of 0 corresponds to no. The average score was 0.3.

and the interaction of citizens is more often characterised by mistrust.¹⁴ Elsewhere, we have shown that this contrast may be found not just in Italy but throughout Europe.¹⁵ Such a suggestion is reinforced by the results of the EVS presented here. In any case, countries bordering on the North Sea can be said to have a well-developed if motley collection of associations, societies and volunteer organizations that we usually indicate by the term 'civil society'. These associations can only flourish if citizens have sufficient trust in each other. According to Putnam, the opposite is also true, namely that the mutual trust between citizens is enhanced by their participation in these types of associations and organisations. Whatever the exact causality may be, the figures show a clear correlation. It is therefore not surprising that countries in northwest Europe have high scores in their responses to the question whether most people can be trusted (see Graph 10.6). Given an average European score of 0.30, countries with a score 0.41 or higher (Iceland, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark) constitute typical examples of what is known as a *high trust society*. With a score of 0.60, the Netherlands occupies third place on this list and is only surpassed by Sweden and Denmark.

¹⁴ Putnam 1993, p. 81-115, 177-178.

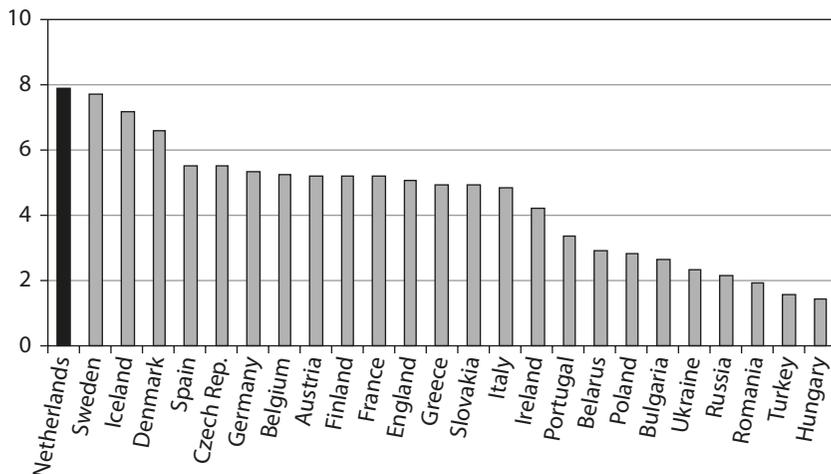
¹⁵ Van den Brink 2002, p. 96-105.

7 Intimacy

We now address the register of the vital values and, in their regard, we will once again be looking at different scales. Although the values of this register are all connected with the biological dimension of human existence, it makes a difference if the moral sensitivity relates to people in social groups or to nature in its totality. We again base our research on the EVS. We must admit that the results in this area are somewhat less convincing than in the areas of work or citizenship. There are only a few variables that act as good indicators for vitality, and the most interesting questions are simply not asked. It is therefore necessary to make use of the items that have been asked and the scores that we derive from them.

Let us begin at the beginning, which in this case is motherhood. Do Europeans think that a woman's life is fulfilled only once she has had children? It is well known that the process of modernisation has had a significant influence on this. In traditional countries, motherhood is an important objective in life for women, while people in modern societies find other life goals acceptable. In a number of southeast European countries such as Romania, Russia, Ukraine and Hungary, the score is higher than 0.80, which means that they largely regard motherhood as the primary purpose of a woman's life. Countries such as England, Iceland, Finland and the Netherlands have scores of 0.20 or lower. With a score of 0.07, the Netherlands is in fact at the bottom (there was no data available for Sweden in 2008). It can therefore be inferred that Dutch women have a lot of freedom to determine what to do with their lives. They may choose motherhood, and in most cases this will be together with a partner. But there is no longer an automatic relationship between having a sexual partner and having children. Physical love or pleasure are valued as such and no longer derive their legitimacy from the need to reproduce.

It is precisely for this reason that, since the 1960s, homosexuality has become increasingly acceptable. In general, citizens have less difficulty with homosexuality the more modern their society becomes. This is confirmed by the results of the EVS. While the average score on the question of whether one accepts homosexuality is 4.18 on a 10-point scale, the level of tolerance varies quite significantly across countries (see Graph 10.7). It is extremely low in countries such as the Ukraine, Russia, Romania, Turkey and Hungary. In other countries such as Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and the Netherlands, homosexuality is widely accepted. The list is again led by the Netherlands, whose score of 7.83 indicates the greatest tolerance for homosexuality – once again, a sign that many Dutch people consider physical love as such to be legitimate.

Graph 10.7 Acceptability of homosexuality

Note: Data derived from EVS 2008. A score of 10 means that homosexuality can always be justified while the score of 0 indicates that homosexuality can never be justified (variable F118). The average score was 4.18.

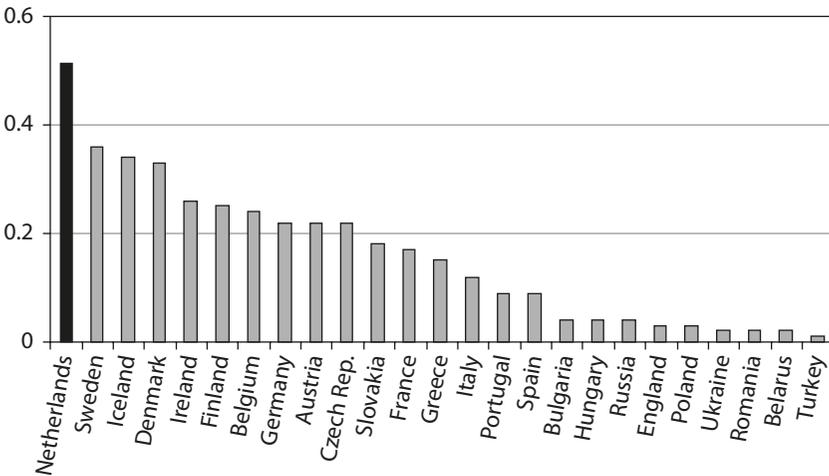
Against this background, it is understandable that they also do not have much difficulty with divorce. The breaking up of relationships is particularly taboo in societies that emphasise the link between sexuality and reproduction. If the emphasis is on loving relationships rather than children, then the end of a relationship is more easily accepted. This is precisely what we find in Europe. Northern countries have little difficulty with divorce. Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Iceland achieve a score of 6.55 or higher on a scale of 0 (not acceptable) to 10 (= always acceptable), while the European average is 5.47. Turkey, Romania, Ukraine and Hungary register scores lower than 4.60, indicating much less tolerance when it comes to divorce.

It therefore appears that modernisation is accompanied by a very liberal attitude regarding private life. To a large extent, the citizens of a modern society decide for themselves how they deal with their physical needs or desires. A similar liberal attitude is found in response to whether euthanasia was acceptable in certain cases. Broad support for this practice seems to exist in Europe, as the average score is 4.74 on a scale of 0 (not acceptable) to 10 (= always acceptable). At the same time, we find a significant degree of variation: the predominantly Catholic countries condemn euthanasia, while Sweden, France and Denmark show more flexibility. The most liberal attitude is found in the Netherlands, which occupies the leading position in Europe with a score of 6.74.

8 Nature and the environment

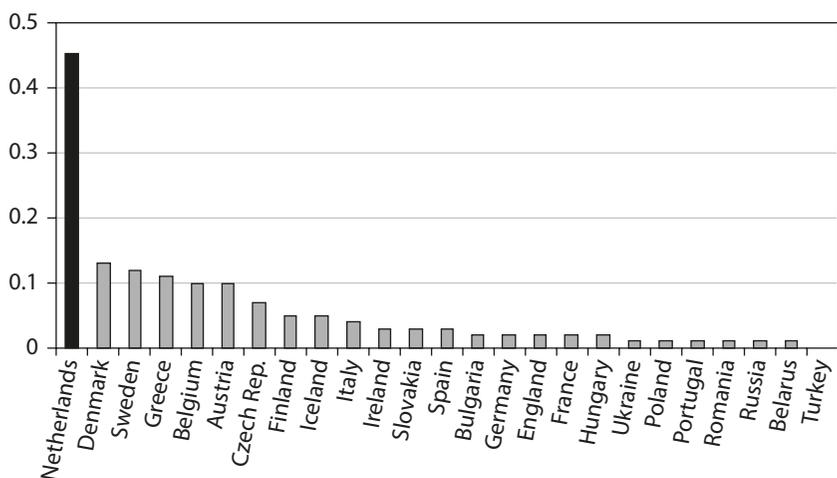
It is not strange that the latter countries also display great interest in sports and health. In the south and east of Europe, by contrast, this sort of organisation was not popular (see Graph 10.8). The scores of countries such as Bulgaria, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Romania do not reach much higher than 0.01. At the other end of the scale are countries such as Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and Austria, where scores are 0.07 or higher. In this group, Austria and the Netherlands occupy first and second place respectively. Should these tendencies continue, we can expect other matters in the area of biology to be regarded as moral concerns. This is consistent with the sharp increase in interest for organisations in the field of nature and environmental conservation. Furthermore, it is consistent with other more anecdotal information, such as the fact that there is now a Party for the Animals in the Dutch parliament. In the EVS survey, this topic is not featured prominently, but there are two variables that give us an indication of the way countries view this. The first is the number of respondents who were members of organisations for environmental or animal rights. The second variable concerns the willingness of respondents to surrender a portion of their income for the benefit of the environment. There is little variation within Europe regarding this point, but the average

Graph 10.8 Participation in organised recreation or sports



Note: Data derived from EVS 2008. A score of 1 means that the respondent belongs to a sports club and a score of 0 indicates that the respondent does not belong to any such club (variable A074). The average score is 0.15.

Graph 10.9 Membership in an organisation for animal rights or environmental protection



Note: Data derived from EVS 2008. A score of 1 means that the respondent belongs to an animal rights or environmental protection organisation and 0 that the respondent does not belong to such an organisation (variable A071). The European average is 0.05.

score is not bad. The Netherlands, with a score of 2.85, is in sixth place. This relatively modest performance is more than compensated for, however, by the answer to the first question. The average score for membership of an organisation supporting animal rights or environmental conservation is not very high. Only Greece, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands obtain a score of 0.10 or more (see Graph 10.9). The Netherlands stands out with a score of 0.45. The finding illustrates the fact that a phenomenon such as the Party for the Animals is not an aberration but stems from a widely held concern for nature. One need only recall the fact that the Christian faith has traditionally insisted on the fundamental difference between humans and animals to realise the extent of the revolution that is under way in Dutch society.

9 Cultural modernisation

If we now take another look at the expansion of moral sensitivity, we see that this process has not occurred with equal strength in all European countries. In some countries, attention has been almost entirely focused on one or two forms of engagement. In other countries, several forms may be identified, each of which is important. Finally, there are countries that occupy an

in-between position: certain forms play primary roles, while others appear to be rather marginal. It may not be superfluous to illustrate this somewhat abstract conclusion visually (see figure 10.1). We did so by making use of the figure with the nine areas of commitment that we presented at the beginning of this chapter, in which moral sentiment may relate to such matters as spirituality, democracy, humanity, brotherhood, professionalism, society, intimacy, lifestyle and naturalism.

To determine the weight that is given to these fields in the various countries, one variable will be chosen from the EVS in each case.¹⁶ Since we know the score that each country obtains on this variable, the relative position of that country can then be determined. We begin by referring to the European average and determine how the score of a given country compares to that average. Four categories will be created, each of which will be identified by a number and a grey shade: 1) fields in which scores are less than 50 percent of the EU average are white; 2) fields in which scores range from 50 to 100 percent are shaded light grey; 3) fields in which the scores are 100 to 200 percent of the average are coloured medium grey; and 4) fields with scores reaching 200 percent or more above the average are dark grey. By means of the shading, we can see which fields play a prominent role per country and thereby also how the focus of the respondents is distributed across the various fields. As we are dealing with many combinations, we limit ourselves to some of the most striking cases.

Let us first examine the situation in Romania. Figure 10.2 suggests that, for the Romanian population, moral engagement manifests itself in two ways. There is one field where the score is above average (faith) and another field displaying a more modest score (democracy). Scores in the other fields remain far below the European average. Put in simple terms, this means that Romanians place two things first and foremost: democracy and commitment to God. They show much less appreciation for the idealistic dimension of work, for volunteering or for efforts in the areas of health

16 It was not possible to construct a reliable scale for all areas of commitment. Therefore, we will use one variable for this category. Our preference was for the following indicators: how important is God in your life (variable F063), opinion on democracy as a political system (variable E117), good salary is important in a job (variable C011), does volunteer work for the elderly, disabled etc. (variable A081), most people can be trusted (variable A165), membership in a human rights organisation (variable A070), homosexuality is justifiable (variable F118), membership in a sports clubs (variable A074) and membership in an organisation for animal rights or environmental conservation (variable A071). In addition, the scores for the importance of a good salary are indicated in mirrored form.

Figure 10.2 Scores of six countries for nine forms of engagement

Romania

3	2	1
1	1	1
1	1	1

France

2	3	1
3	3	2
3	3	1

Poland

3	2	1
2	1	2
2	1	1

Finland

2	2	4
3	3	3
3	3	3

Portugal

3	3	1
2	3	1
2	2	1

The Netherlands

2	3	4
4	3	4
3	4	4

or nature conservation. Romania closely approximates the 'traditional' situation that also existed in the Netherlands prior to modernisation.

If we look at Poland, we see that the traditional situation has to some extent been altered there. The centre of gravity is clear (i.e. faith), but we also see some appreciation for other forms of moral commitment: democratic values and social trust, as well as volunteering and sexual freedoms. Note, however, that the scores in these fields are still lower than the European average. At the same time, we see that the Poles show relatively little commitment when it comes to human dignity, the idealistic significance of work, participation in sports or nature conservation. An example of what may be termed a subsequent phase in the process of moral expansion is found in Portugal. The Portuguese attribute a great deal of value to faith, democracy and the ideal dimension of work. They also have some appreciation for sports, sexual freedom and volunteers (although their scores for these last three fields are below the European average). However, their scores in other fields remain low. France is our fourth example. The scores for faith and social trust in this country are lower than the European averages, and even lower in the fields of nature conservation and human rights. At the same time, there are five fields in which scores are above average. Matters that are valued relatively highly by the French are democratic values, the idealistic significance of work, participation in sports, volunteer work and sexual freedom, but we do not encounter any real outliers.

A country that does display exceptional scores is Finland. Its score on human rights is at least 200 percent above the European average. Furthermore, there is no single field that belongs to the lowest category. There are only two fields in which the score is lower than average (democracy and faith). Everything points to the fact that moral sensitivity is very highly developed in nearly all fields. The fact that the Finns obtain an above-average score in seven of the nine fields enables us to conclude that the respondents are committed to many values or ideals. Nevertheless, there are other countries where the moral expansion is even more strongly developed. For instance, Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark all have the highest scores in four or more fields. These countries have clearly distanced themselves from the traditional situation in which moral commitment is focused on one or two ideals. Their respondents pursue many ideals. What these northwest European countries have in common is the fact that traditional faith has a relatively modest score, while issues such as sexuality or sports are appreciated significantly. Finally, it is noteworthy that the Netherlands scores above-average in nearly all fields. The figure shows that five of the nine fields are dark grey, while only one field has a light grey shade. All this

points to the fact that moral engagement is considerably well developed in the Netherlands. Evidently, the Dutch value many forms of involvement. They commit themselves to various values and ideals – although they are less interested in faith in God. We could say that the Netherlands stands at one extreme end of a complex spectrum, with Romania at the other end.

10 Conclusions

This brings us to the conclusions for this chapter. We see that the expansion of moral sentiments has unfolded not only over time but also geographically. In preceding chapters, we argued that the traditional form of moral commitment in the Netherlands still exists but that new forms have emerged in the course of history. As a result, we now have various forms of morality, with the Dutch devoting themselves to their ideals in multiple areas. This chapter showed that this process is occurring throughout Europe. Not a single country continues to fully adhere to the traditional situation in which its citizens are exclusively guided by religious values. Social values have also become important everywhere, while a number of countries have added vital values. We interpret this process as a form of cultural modernisation, with significant differences in levels. In some countries, faith in God still carries a great deal of weight, but there are also countries where secularisation has had a strong impact. Examples of the first group are Ireland, Poland, Romania and Portugal, while examples of the latter are Germany, Denmark, Sweden and the Czech Republic. There are also differences in other forms of commitment. In some countries, a relatively large portion of the population consider it important to teach their children to respect their fellow human beings (for example in Finland, Spain and Austria), while elsewhere less value is attached to this (for example in England and Portugal). There are countries where we see a strong commitment to nature conservation (Denmark, Belgium and Greece); in other countries, this gives rise to no enthusiasm at all (Russia or Turkey).

Our first conclusion is that there is a distinctive geographical distribution in this moral expansion. Broadly speaking, one can say that this process is most developed in northwest Europe and that the development in southeast Europe is less advanced. More specifically, Europe can be divided into three zones. The first contains Iceland, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium.¹⁷ Allocated to the second zone are Ireland,

¹⁷ The Czech Republic also belongs to this zone.

England, Germany, Austria, France, Spain, Italy and Greece. The last zone includes Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and Turkey.¹⁸ In general countries in the first zone are characterised by a high level of moral sensitivity, manifesting itself in a variety of fields. The opposite holds for countries in the third zone, and in the second zone we encounter a mixed situation.¹⁹

Our second conclusion is that this distribution corresponds strongly with structural modernisation. As we saw in chapter 1, northwest European countries constitute a vanguard in the areas of economics, demographics, politics and communications. They have high levels of prosperity, strong economies and limited corruption; they are dedicated to human rights and promote political participation; and they possess a developed communications infrastructure. The opposite applies to most countries in the southeast region with regard to these points.²⁰ There appears to be a correlation between structural and cultural modernisation. This is illustrated in Figure 10.3, where the x-axis refers to the average ranking of a country in terms of structural modernisation and the y-axis refers to its ranking in terms of cultural modernisation.²¹ Quite apart from the fact that there is an obvious correlation in this respect (R squared is 0.758), we see that Europe can, in fact, be divided into three sectors, or zones, on the basis of these characteristics. In northwest Europe, there are six countries that are relatively modern in both respects (the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, Finland and Belgium). In the south and east, there are ten countries that are not modern in these two respects (Portugal, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Belarus, Russia, Poland, Turkey and Romania). In addition, there is a group of Central European countries that occupy an intermediate position in this respect (Ireland, England, Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, France, Spain, Italy and Greece).

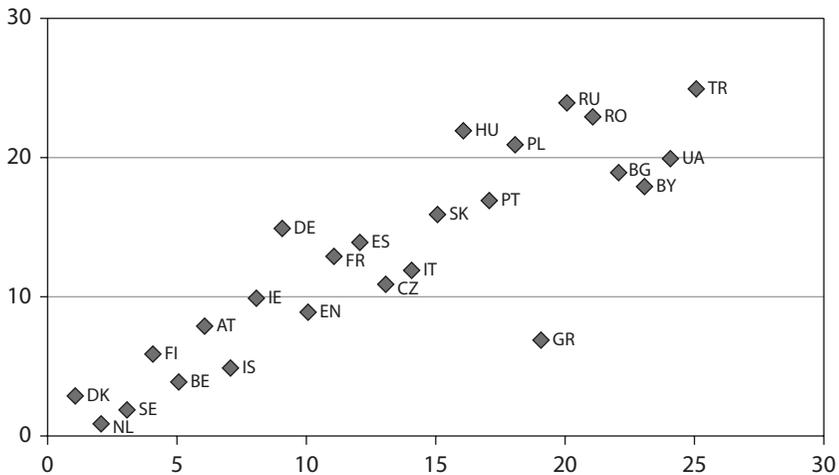
18 Portugal must also be added to this group.

19 These zones do not exactly match the zones sketched in chapter 1. Of the 21 countries in the two series, two-thirds belong to the same category. Countries remaining in zone 1 are Iceland, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and Denmark; countries still in zone 2 are Ireland, England, France, Austria, Slovakia and Italy; countries still part of Zone 3 are Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey.

20 See the data in Table 1.1.

21 To determine this score, we determined the ranking for each country for the 14 indicators that define the dimension of structural modernisation. In this manner, we determined the average ranking of the country. In an analogous manner, an average ranking per country was determined for the nine indicators that together define the dimension of cultural and spiritual modernisation. Given that a total of 25 countries are involved, each country was given a rank between 0 and 25 on each dimension. Incidentally, we do not want to assign an exact meaning to this exercise. The point is simply to illustrate the fact that structural and cultural modernisation are related.

Figure 10.3 Ranking of countries in terms of structural (x-axis) and cultural (y-axis) modernisation



Our third conclusion is that the Netherlands (together with Sweden) occupies a special position within this spectrum. Based on the variables that we explored in this chapter, we can state that, in many respects, the Netherlands belongs to the European vanguard. The only exception to this is the modest interest in religious life. However, other moral ideals are considerably popular among the Dutch population. For instance, there is quite some interest in politics and a significant amount of value attached to good personal relations at work. There are many Dutch citizens who devote themselves to their fellow human beings, focusing not just on people in their immediate surroundings but also on the fate of people elsewhere in the world. They have respect for their fellow citizens and grant everyone the freedom to live their lives the way they want. They put much effort into maintaining a healthy lifestyle and practicing a sport, while they also give high priority to issues such as conservation or animal welfare. On certain points, they came in first place within Europe. This is particularly the case for various forms of volunteer work,²² the role of organisations promoting human and animal rights,²³ and for freedoms with regard to one's private

²² Especially in such areas as care for the disabled or elderly, cultural activities and sports participation.

²³ Especially membership in associations related to human rights, animal rights or nature conservation.

life.²⁴ This data indicates that the process of cultural modernisation in the Netherlands is quite strongly developed.

At the same time, we must not make things out to be better than they are. The progressive position of the Netherlands does not mean that Dutch society is becoming more open and tolerant. Chapter 4 certainly demonstrated that the Netherlands is becoming a more intolerant society. Precisely because Dutch citizens maintain high ideals, values and expectations in many areas, they want everyone to conform to these values. Despite its liberality, Dutch society does exert considerable pressure on others to assimilate. This is illustrated by the responses to the question of how Dutch people regard new neighbours who deviate from the norm. On certain points, the Dutch do adopt a generous attitude. They have little difficulty with homosexuals or neighbours suffering from aids. But on other points, the EVS reveals a less tolerant attitude. In other words, the Dutch may be free but at the same time they are very selective. They are liberal as long as they are dealing with people or behaviours that fit well with modern society but are (very) dismissive of behaviours that deviate from this. Incidentally, the Netherlands is not the only country with paradoxical results. Respondents in Finland, Iceland, Sweden and Denmark also articulate a fairly high degree of intolerance to all kinds of neighbours. All this illustrates that we cannot equate cultural modernisation with greater openness. The opposite is more likely to be the case.²⁵

24 Especially a high degree of acceptance in the area of homosexuality, euthanasia or suicide.

25 To mention a few growth indicators, we determined an above-average increase in intolerance in England (122 percent), Sweden (122 percent), Iceland (134 percent), the Netherlands (137 percent), Ireland (146 percent), Belgium (150 percent), Denmark (165 percent) and France (192 percent). Countries where tolerance remains unchanged or is reduced include Germany (100 percent), Bulgaria (87 percent), Romania (87 percent), Czech Republic (85 percent) and Portugal (60 percent).

Part 6

11 An outline of modern morality

Gabriël van den Brink

It is time to assess our findings. What, then, have we learned from our description of the Netherlands as a modern society? How do things stand with regard to moral sentiments in this society? And to what extent can we extrapolate more general conclusions from our specific case? Before we answer these questions, let us go back to the problem we set out in the first two chapters of this book. We wanted to find out how the process of modernisation and the cultivation of moral values impact each other (section 1). One difficulty we have in assessing our findings is that our empirical research covers such sharply divergent developments, processes and phenomena. So we shall list thirty specific phenomena that may be taken as a summary of our main findings. For each of these phenomena, we shall then determine what effect modern society has on moral sentiments. We make a distinction between phenomena that reflect a deterioration of, or a threat to, morality (section 2), phenomena where the effect we see is neutral or ambivalent (section 3), phenomena that we regard as having moderately positive effects (section 4) and phenomena where the effects seem unequivocally positive (section 5). Using this as a basis, we move to a more general consideration of what a 'modernisation of morality' could imply (section 6). In addition, we shall explore the converse line of thought and say something about the 'moralising of modernity' (section 7). We conclude with a discussion of civic life in the Netherlands. We shall show how, after the 1960s, the public domain has 'liberated' itself from all moral values and that this applies in particular to political life (section 8). It can also be argued, however, that wherever it occurs, political activity always has its ethical aspects (section 9). The conflict between these tendencies may explain the tensions that have characterised civic life in the Netherlands over the past two decades and which have resulted, among other things, in the emergence of populism (section 10).

1 Back to the original question

As promised, we turn first to the problem we set out in the first two chapters of this book. We wanted to get to grips with the significance of moral sentiments in modern society. For this, we had to take three steps.

To begin with, we explained what we mean by the term modernity. It is a way of life that has soaked up the consequences of the three great ruptures in Europe's past. The first was the scientific revolution and the processes of rationalisation that go with it. The consequences of this are no longer confined to the realm of science and technology; they are evident in pretty much every area of life. The second rupture was created by the political revolutions of the late eighteenth century. They prompted a process of democratisation that spread at a varying pace, and not without its hiccups, to far beyond Europe. A third revolution was the industrialisation of economic life, which, in many European countries, was only completed towards the end of the nineteenth century. It led to mechanisation and mass production on a grand scale, setting the standard for the entire world. This view of modernisation is of particular significance because it does not reduce modern existence to a single level. Anyone who wants to understand modern life cannot be satisfied with technological factors or with political or economic factors alone. It is precisely the combination of these factors that lends effectiveness to the processes of modernisation. Another advantage of this view is that it bypasses the simple division of theory and practice. It cannot be denied that modernisation is often pragmatic: it is not a matter of utopias but of changes that are realised in the here and now. But a number of principles are at stake in this change. Modern life cannot be properly understood if the quest for truth, equality and efficiency is dismissed as an illusion. It is precisely the combination of ideals and reality that made the modern programme a success within and far beyond the borders of Europe.

It does not, of course, follow from this that the expansion of modern life always takes a smooth course. Usually, the process of modernisation leads to all sorts of tensions. This is because the principles that keep the process going do not automatically fit with the social and cultural traditions of the receiving society. Efforts towards modernity are never conducted in a vacuum: they clash with a society that is already there and which will not simply stop existing. The ideas, values, priorities and routines of this society are often the result of an age-old history, and they are frequently at odds with the three principles that characterise modern life. Not every country is anxious to recognise the equality of all individuals, not every regime appreciates the independent quest for truth, and there are many societies that oppose what the West regards as an effective way of doing things. The question of whether a solution may be found for these tensions, and if so, what it would comprise depends mainly on historical and political factors. In many cases, the result will be a mix in which traditional values or ideas

on the one hand and modern ideals or principles on the other will impact each other to varying degrees. This interaction occurs, by the way, not only in far-off and exotic lands but also on the continent of Europe itself. Hence we cannot take 'modern society' in Norway or Denmark to be the same thing as 'modern society' in Italy or Greece.

Our third step is to examine what the significance of these factors might be for the moral realm. Although we fully acknowledge the ethical dimension of modern life, we do not believe that modernity and morality coincide. On the contrary. Unavoidably, there is tension between the acceptance of ideals like truth, equality and efficiency on the one hand and the cultivation of moral sentiments on the other. At issue in these sentiments is, in particular, the human imagination (rather than our rationality) and the fact that they are related to specific situations (rather than to large-scale organisations) and refer to moral substance (rather than to equal rights). The quest for an acceptable mix of modernity and morality is therefore no easy task. This also means that the combination can look very different depending on the particular context and time. In one case, the modernisation of society may lead to a form of moral erosion, while in another it can lead precisely to powerful moral resistance. From one perspective, modernity means that moral values are viewed as a private matter, from another they turn out to strengthen public indignation. Sometimes moral norms are slowly upgraded in the context of a modern approach, and sometimes the opposite occurs, with the modern approach leading precisely to a relaxation of morals. In other words: little can be said generally about the relation between morality and modernity. But what can certainly be done – and what in fact we have done in relation to the Netherlands – is to draw up an inventory of what effects occur in reality and what circumstances contribute to this.

In the paragraphs that follow, just such an inventory is drawn up. We take as our basis the many empirical insights presented in chapters 3 to 10. We ask a single question at this point, namely whether the modernisation of the Netherlands has a negative, neutral, ambivalent or positive influence on the moral sentiments of those concerned. It is obvious that we cannot do justice to all details and nuances that have been presented for this. To that extent, our argument in this last chapter is more philosophical or social-theoretical in nature than historical or sociological. But in comparison with many other views on such notions as morality or modernity, we are reasonably concrete and specific.

2 Negative effects

In this section, we discuss a number of modern phenomena that have a predominantly negative effect on morality. We present them in an arbitrary order, disregarding any possible correlation between them.

Secularisation presses ahead

After a hesitant start in the first half of the twentieth century, from the 1960s onwards secularisation proceeded apace in the Netherlands, with the consequence that two-thirds of the present population regard themselves as not affiliated to a church. The number of Dutch people that attend a church service once a month or more has dropped to 17 percent. This does not mean that the population no longer has any interest in spirituality or religion. It does, however, mean that people no longer express this interest via a church organisation. The decline in membership does not only affect the churches. Other organisations (trade unions or political parties) have also witnessed a drop in membership, while permanent relationships (with an employer or marriage partner) have become more and more flexible. But the decline of the church is certainly quite considerable. Although churches still propagate a form of moral engagement, and often indeed put it into practice, their role in public life has become marginal. This certainly does not make the propagation of public morals any easier.¹

The rise of an assertive lifestyle

A more assertive lifestyle developed in the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards. In practice, this means that members of the public, employees, pupils and customers will not simply resign themselves to a particular situation. They display much self-esteem and attach a great deal of importance to their individual self-reliance. This attitude leads relatively quickly to annoyance: it only takes a little thing to happen for a person to feel offended. Furthermore, where this attitude prevails, it is not easy to find empathy for others. The expansion of this lifestyle flows from the modernisation of society and the emphasis on individual preferences and decisions. It flourishes best in anonymous or large-scale environments. And it can easily be rationalised with the help of the liberal philosophy that has become increasingly influential in the course of the past thirty years. But viewed

1 Chapter 4, section 1.

from the standpoint of moral commitment, the effect is largely negative. In practice, this attitude seems to be in tension with sentiments of compassion towards other people.²

Thrill-seeking

Interest in having extreme emotional or sensory experiences has increased among the Dutch population over the last thirty years. It is evident in what people do at the weekends, the way people spend their holidays and more generally the way people spend their leisure time. All this is associated with an increase in the consumption of alcohol and other stimulants. This trend is not limited to adults: the age at which Dutch young people first drink alcohol has gradually gone down, while the incidence of heavy drinking has gone up. We are inclined to see this behaviour as a form of compensation for the high demands that modern life places on people: a temporary escape from the pressure to exhibit controlled, rational behaviour; the search for a sense of community in reaction to the impersonal relations that often characterise the public or professional domain. Despite the ambivalence of this trend, from a moral point of view it is not very positive, given that the emphasis is far too much on personal or immediate experiences.³

Anti-social behaviour and annoyance

In the past few decades, the Netherlands has been increasingly plagued by aggressive and anti-social behaviour. Since 1970, the number of registered violent offences per 100,000 inhabitants has risen fivefold. Instances of disturbances of the public order and vandalism have increased ninefold. This growth can partly be attributed to better recording of instances, but this does not take away the fact that complaints about anti-social behaviour are increasing markedly. Often the concern is with nuisances caused by (certain groups of) youths in public areas. Many citizens see these problems as linked to the modernisation of society. They point to the disappearance of a community spirit, the erosion of norms and values, the demise of controls due to vast scale of things and more generally the increasingly impersonal nature of all relationships. This explanation may be disputed in some of its details, but in essence it is correct. Anyone taking our view of moral

2 Chapter 4, section 6.

3 Chapter 4, section 3.

responsibility will realise that the urban environment does not exactly stimulate the demonstration or the developing of this responsibility.⁴

No deviant behaviour, please

Although the Netherlands has the reputation of being a tolerant society, acceptance of deviant behaviour has receded in the past thirty years. This much is evident from reactions to a question on what type of neighbour you would not like to have. Respondents have little patience with heavy drinkers, those with a large family or those who hold extreme political views. The trend is apparent in various democratic and modern countries, including those that have long been known as 'high trust societies'. This illustrates that modernisation does not necessarily lead to more tolerance. Rather, it leads to the expectation that each individual will behave in a rational and predictable manner. Given the high degree of mobility and social interaction, this predictability is meant to prevent undesirable circumstances. People who deviate from the norm (e.g. immigrants) pay a price for this. Integration is not easy, as the codes of behaviour often remain implicit. The effect on moral sensitivity is negative because compassion at the everyday level is discouraged.⁵

A harder social climate

A certain hardening is evident in social relations. Although many Dutch citizens cherish the idea of a social community – people want to keep things together – it is coming under pressure as a result of the modernisation of society. The choice for a business-like approach, the emphasis on individual self-reliance and efforts towards upscaling or efficiency leave little room for more courteous forms of social intercourse. And many citizens are complaining about this. They are bothered by the increase in selfish behaviour and say that things are moving in the wrong direction in the Netherlands. They take a more and more rigid view of people who have no regard for social norms. It is a long time since criminals could count on any sympathy. But even those who commit a less serious offence are treated harshly. Judges are affected by this disapproval, which is evident from the fact that they are passing more guilty verdicts and issuing harsher

4 Chapter 4, section 4.

5 Chapter 4, sections 7-8; chapter 6, section 7.

sentences. Moral sentiments do not play a role here, unless we are talking about sentiments of one's own moral rightness.⁶

Bureaucratisation of institutions

The increase in social mobility (in every sense of the word) causes citizens to have difficulty with traditional institutions. Because they act out of more personal motives and want to realise their own ideals, they easily find institutional rules and routines to be an obstacle. This happens especially in professional organisations. People who work in the police force or in the healthcare sector often do so not because they are after a high salary. They want to make a contribution to a more just society or help their fellow human beings. Their idealism, however, clashes with the concerns of modern managers who, in leading their organisation, are primarily interested in such values as efficiency and functionality. And it also clashes with the many rules that have been placed by the authorities upon professional activity. In many cases, this results in an impasse: on the one hand, moral commitment is increasing in these types of professions, but on the other hand it is not acknowledged by the modern way of working.⁷

3 Ambivalent or neutral effects

This section is concerned with modern trends or phenomena that have a neutral or more ambivalent effect on morality.

Self-expression is increasingly important

To a large degree, the development of the Netherlands corresponds with the theory set out by Inglehart and Norris on the process of modernisation. Two changes have a part in this. First, in the transition from agrarian to industrial society, traditionally religious values make way for secular ideas. Second, the transition to a post-industrial society causes survival-oriented values to be replaced by values that serve the self-expression of the individual. The first change came to its completion already before the Second World War. In the Netherlands, it led to a process of secularisation that accelerated from the 1960s onwards. The other change came about in the second half

6 Chapter 4, section 6.

7 Chapter 3, sections 5-6 and 9; chapter 7, section 2.

of the twentieth century and persists to the present day. In consequence, in the Netherlands values based on self-expression and vitality are growing in importance. The moral effects of all this are ambivalent. They can both erode and strengthen the development of moral sentiments.⁸

The standard of living has risen significantly

In the Netherlands, there has always been an undercurrent that believes that wealth and moral values are mutually exclusive. This belief existed already in the seventeenth century, and at present it is expressed in a new form. Take the idea that economic growth and morality are never compatible. But without growth, society would have looked quite different. Precisely because the Netherlands invested in rationalisation and the pursuit of economies of scale, productivity grew steadily, and this has resulted in an almost unbroken rise in prosperity since the Second World War. Partly for this reason, governments have been able to keep income differences to a minimum. Although this has no inherent moral value, indirectly it is relevant to us. We know that self-expressive values are stronger when one reaches a higher level of prosperity, when a larger proportion of the population has paid work and when income differences are modest. Because these factors (can) promote the development of moral sentiments, we must view prosperity as a neutral precondition for morality.⁹

Upgrading ethical standards

There are many areas in which the Netherlands applies high ethical norms (often resulting from processes of modernisation in the past). Thus we see that Dutch citizens have always had a high regard for honesty. And they take a strict view on matters relating to public morality such as the use of bribes, tax fraud or abuses of social welfare benefits. This applies also to misbehaviour in the private sphere such as lying, adultery or causing a nuisance. A further factor is that expectations in the ethical realm are slowly but surely rising. Good citizenship now means far more than subjects upholding the law. In pretty much any domain, we see that ethical norms are now higher or more explicitly formulated than a few decades ago. The consequences of this trend in the moral realm are ambiguous. On the one hand, it makes people take their own ethical principles increasingly

8 Chapter 6, sections 3-4.

9 Chapter 3, section 1; chapter 6, section 2.

seriously. On the other hand, it also has the consequence of new ‘problems’ constantly arising.¹⁰

Vital values increasingly important

In answer to the question what was the most essential thing in their lives, 26 percent of our respondents indicated vital values. Interest in these values has grown tremendously in a relatively short time. But it is not easy to ascribe a moral assessment to it. This is because this category has divergent motives. On one hand, it involves such things as having fun, enjoying life and keeping things simple. On the other hand, it is also about such things as self-development, being successful and instilling inspiration. Both facets can be linked to modern society. The first facet is related to the pursuit of intense experiences, the thrill-seeking we spoke about earlier, the second facet with the more entrepreneurial attitude that goes hand in hand with modern citizenship. Such things have little to do with moral sensitivity. At the same time these vital values also point to caring for nature, and this can certainly be regarded as a form of moral commitment. We have to conclude that the moral significance of this trend remains ambivalent.¹¹

More sports and a healthier lifestyle

In recent decades, Dutch people have become increasingly involved in active sports. The time spent on sports has increased accordingly. The average ten years ago was already 2.6 hours a week, despite the fact that most people’s lives became busier in every respect. This interest stems from various motives. Many, for example, strive to follow a healthier lifestyle. But the need to look young and energetic also plays a part. In addition, sports provides a splendid opportunity to escape briefly from the stress of modern life, a need felt especially by people who spend their whole working day using their brains. Finally, sports provides an opportunity to meet other people in a relaxed way. A comparison with the past immediately demonstrates that modern phenomena are at issue here. But how we are to evaluate this from a moral point of view is another matter. Personally, we would tend to regard the concern for health and sports as a neutral affair.¹²

10 Chapter 3, section 4; chapter 4, section 5; chapter 6, section 6.

11 Chapter 5, sections 3-5; chapter 7, section 6.

12 Chapter 4, section 2.

4 Moderately positive effects

This section is concerned with modern phenomena that have a moderately positive effect on the development or demonstration of moral sentiments.

Spirituality can provide a counterbalance

In answer to the question what was the most essential thing in their lives, 18 percent of our respondents indicated religious values. We realise that this category contains divergent forms of spiritual engagement. It includes orthodox Christians who regularly attend church services, but equally the 'something-ists', those who believe there is more between heaven and earth than we can perceive. It includes Muslims who reject modern values, especially in the Netherlands, but also people who mix Western and Eastern traditions in a contemporary way. Characteristic of modern spirituality is not fixed tenets of faith but the fact that believers explain or apply them in a highly personal way. This allows people to counterbalance the rational, individual and large-scale sides of modern society. From a moral point of view, this is to be welcomed.¹³

Freedom of conscience is paramount

It was primarily the socio-cultural changes of the 1960s that brought about a modernisation of private life. The influence of Christian ideas of marriage, sexuality and reproduction receded, and secular ideas took their place. In the Netherlands, this led to relatively liberal legislation on such matters as abortion, euthanasia and divorce. Across the board, more space was gradually created for behaviour and preferences that were once dismissed as deviant. The now fairly broad acceptance of homosexuality by the Dutch population is an illustration of this. More generally, there is a degree of consensus on questions affecting someone's identity: this is a prime area in which only the person affected can pass judgment on. Citizens with no faith go further in this respect than people with traditional religious ideas. Although there is sometimes cause for doubts of a moral nature, one cannot say that modernity and moral values are mutually exclusive. In fact, they are quite close to each other.¹⁴

13 Chapter 5, sections 3-6; chapter 7, section 6.

14 Chapter 6, section 5.

Compassion among non-believers too

The marginalisation of churches does not mean that interest in spiritual matters is also disappearing. We know that 60 percent of the Dutch population regard themselves as religious. An equal proportion believe in a God or a life spirit. It is not very surprising that people from the latter group also frequently adhere to religious or sacred values. More surprising is the fact that many people who reject any religious faith still develop their own understanding of 'higher values'. Thus agnostics and atheists tend to prefer social values. In all, 88 percent of our respondents described higher principles as the core of their human existence. This belies the notion that contemporary citizens are primarily after their own interests. It also means that moral feelings – compassion in particular – are experienced and expressed in a variety of ways. In this sense, modern society is leading not to an erosion but to an increase of moral sensitivity.¹⁵

Variation in moral commitment

In modern society, ethical principles take a whole variety of forms. As far as the Netherlands is concerned, we observed that traditional forms of moral behaviour still appear while new forms are developing alongside them. Some are devoted to God but others place themselves in the service of our democracy or of humanity as a whole. The commitment of the former is primarily religious in orientation, the second opts for social engagement and the third is concerned with vital values. It seems to be a general rule that variation in ideals grows in accordance with the level of progress reached in the modernisation of society. This is also evident from the distribution we find in Europe. In the heavily modernised northwest of Europe, citizens strive after many different ideals, while the variation in the south and east of the continent is less pronounced. A certain shift is, however, occurring in that religious values are becoming less popular as modernisation advances, while precisely the opposite applies to vital values.¹⁶

Better education is beneficial

Participation in education has gone up so much in the Netherlands that almost 30 percent of all adults have completed higher education. Women

¹⁵ Chapter 5, sections 1-5; chapter 9, section 1; chapter 10, section 9-10.

¹⁶ Chapter 5, sections 3-5; chapter 10, sections 1-10.

have more than caught up with men in this area. This fact is relevant because higher educated people often have an aversion to traditional ways of thinking. They like to take a secular view of things and find self-expression important. This does not mean that they are insensitive to idealistic values, however. On the contrary. In their professional lives, a prominent role is played not by extrinsic but intrinsic work motivation. In their personal lives, they are more likely than the average person to believe that 'higher principles' exist. They can provide quite a good written explanation of this, too. They show more interest in spiritual things than people with an average education. They are more likely to take up volunteer work and to contribute financially to organisations with an ideological purpose. The moral effects of all this can only be regarded as positive.¹⁷

Offering one's help: being useful to others

In answer to the question what was the most essential thing in their lives, 44 percent of our respondents indicated social values. They want to be useful to other people, make a contribution to society, care for family members and so on. In the professional realm, these values appear at various levels. At the macro level, it is important that the organisation embraces certain moral principles. It is not enough to be making a profit: the organisation must also endorse public values such as health, security or sustainability. At the meso level, modern professionals are keen to have good relations with their bosses and their immediate colleagues. They want to create a working community and expect there to be sufficient regard within the company for the human aspects of work. At the micro level, it is important that one has a real regard for one's customers, that one treats citizens correctly and fairly, that one has as much respect as possible for one's patients, and so on. In modern professional life, morality is important in relation to all these points.¹⁸

Mission statements are common

Back when Dutch society was structured around religious and ideological pillars, many organisations in the public and semi-public sector had an ideological identity. There were Catholic, Protestant or public schools. The same applied to newspapers, insurance companies and hospitals. When

17 Chapter 3, section 3; chapter 6, sections 2, 4-5, 9; chapter 9, section 3.

18 Chapter 7, sections 3 and 5.

this pillarisation ended, this imprint on institutions often became nothing more than a formality. Instead, organisations drew up a mission statement in which they set out in concise language their own values or ambitions. Employees often seem to be well aware of the thrust of this mission. They frequently talk about it, not only at a formal level (for instance during a moral discussion session or on courses) but also at an informal level (when discussing work or during a coffee break). Some employees do not think the statement is really necessary because true professionals have the values concerned within them. Others say that their institution could do more towards realising these values. But on the moral significance of the mission statement for a modern organisation, there is no disagreement.¹⁹

Professional codes of conduct

More and more professional organisations are setting up their own professional code of conduct that sets out the ways in which their staff should behave. The code deals not only with technical aspects but also the ethical aspects of the profession. Many respondents say that it has helped them. The code makes it possible for colleagues to be on the same page, and it also makes it easier to confront a colleague if there are difficulties. Some respondents find such codes superfluous because a true professional should know very well what the core values of the profession boil down to. This trend can be taken as a form of modernisation in three regards. It is a rationalisation of ethical behaviour, an answer to the increased variation associated with individualisation, and a consequence of the move towards a large scale because such codes apply to the entire sector. The overall effect is positive: the moral nature of the profession, after all, becomes more visible, while personal relations are not affected.²⁰

Visibility of empathy

Since the human imagination plays a key role in the prompting of moral sentiments, modernisation also brought forth new phenomena. An interesting example of this is films and TV series that create occasional 'moments of empathy'. At such moments, the viewer feels deeply affected emotionally by the situation of the (generally fictional) protagonist. Several preconditions have to apply for this to happen. The story must articulate higher

¹⁹ Chapter 7, sections 7-8.

²⁰ Chapter 7, section 9.

values, principles or ideals; the realisation of these ideals cannot be a matter of course; actors must embody the protagonist's struggle in a believable manner; the application of light and colour must subtly guide the viewer's feelings; the music must do its job; and so on. Films that are of sufficient quality and meet these requirements often conquer the hearts of a broad public. They illustrate the fact that moral sentiments still apply fully in the modern world and that viewers very much appreciate them being made visible.²¹

5 Clearly positive effects

In this section, we come to modern phenomena that from a moral point of view are indisputably positive in their effects.

Moral clarity in demand

A feature of modern society is the great diversity it displays in the ethical realm. This constitutes one of the great differences from traditional communities, which tend towards moral homogeneity. But in modern times, it is also a matter of degree. As soon as moral dynamics or diversity crosses certain boundaries, groups of citizens can view this as threatening, with the consequence that they then embrace more traditional values. In the Netherlands, this backlash began in the mid-1990s. It went hand in hand with a call for strong leadership, which was a surprise, to say the least, given the tendency towards democratisation. In other countries of north-western Europe, we see the same thing. It is precisely in these democratic and modern societies that we see a 'conservative' turn. This seems to contradict the view taken by many people that modernity and morality are mutually exclusive. We may surmise that this turn is a manifestation of the hard moral substratum that underpins modern society.²²

Authenticity and honesty

We have seen that many Dutch citizens see honesty as a prime aspiration. This does not only apply to their private lives: professionals also value integrity in their work. When banking staff are confronted with conflicts

²¹ Chapter 8, section 7.

²² Chapter 4, section 9.

of interest, they like to act transparently and honestly. Police officers and healthcare employees say the same. We know that conscientious work does not need to be enforced from without: modern professionals are not prepared to go against their conscience, and assume that their bosses respect this. This coincides with a general shift that has occurred in recent decades in the Netherlands. Religiously inspired values have become less prominent, while more importance has been placed on social values such as respect and trustworthiness. Personal values such as authenticity are also valued more highly. On this point, morality and modernity seem to reinforce one another.²³

Idealistic sides of working

As has been said, the modernisation of society is leading to a (seldom observed) increase in norms and expectations. This is also evident in the realm of work. The time when people worked only for their income is behind us. Even though the financial aspect of work is still important, social and ideological aspects have become paramount. People also work in order to be useful to other people, to use what they learned in their education, to make a contribution to society, because they want to maintain good contacts with customers or colleagues, because they need intellectual challenges, and so on. For modern professionals, ethical principles and public morals are extremely important. Although the development of a modern work ethic already began in the seventeenth century (and according to Weber formed the basis of capitalism), it was confined to a limited section of the working population for a long time. In our day, it applies to a large proportion of all professionals who want to be of significance to their fellow human beings as employees or as self-employed individuals. For the modern citizen, working is little less than a moral task – a way of improving the world and acting conscientiously.²⁴

Care for nature and the environment

Concern for nature and the environment has flourished markedly in the Netherlands since the 1970s. Large organisations such as Natuurmonumenten²⁵

23 Chapter 6, section 4; chapter 7, section 1.

24 Chapter 6, section 9; chapter 7, section 4.

25 Natuurmonumenten (full name: Association for the Protection of Nature in the Netherlands) was established in 1905 and its owns 355 nature reserves with a total surface of 102.951 hectares.

and the World Wildlife Fund have gained many new members, with the total number of donors to environmental organisations growing to 2.3 million in 2008. At that time, almost half of all Dutch people were contributing in one way or another to caring for nature and the environment. Some contributions were at a modest level (placing nesting boxes in their garden), others on a somewhat larger scale (collecting litter from nature reserves). Their motives are almost always altruistic in nature: they concern themselves with the fate of plants or animals that are under threat, and they feel close to nature. There clearly is a relationship with the modernisation of life. People try to remove the disadvantages of economic activity or upscaling and advocate instead a sustainable lifestyle. Moral sentiments indisputably play a part in this, even if they relate not so much to other people but to living creatures in a more general sense.²⁶

Continuing support for development aid

A considerable proportion of the Dutch population are keen to help people in developing countries. Many do this by donating money, some by helping out with projects. It is striking that the current preference is for small-scale initiatives and recognisable persons. Such elements as justice, responsibility and honesty play a prominent part in this. The relationship with modernisation remains a complex one. On the one hand, the aid is meant as compensation for the negative effects that flow from such processes as rationalisation, individualisation and upscaling. In terms of content, development aid thus works against modern values. On the other hand, people want to go about giving or organising help in a modern manner. In terms of form, therefore, this help can be seen as supporting modernisation. The overall effect is positive: development aid is an excellent way for people to translate their moral concern for others into action.²⁷

Many volunteers

In terms of participation in volunteer work, the Netherlands has ranked at the top of Europe for some time. Moreover, the share of the population that are donors or volunteer workers has risen in recent decades. There has, however, been a shift in motivation. While the older generation was

In 2013 the number of members mounted to 735,000.

²⁶ Chapter 9, section 6.

²⁷ Chapter 9, sections 4-5.

often motivated by a sense of duty, young people become active because they enjoy their activities as volunteers. In addition, many Dutch people are not fond of grandiloquent explanations. Anyone asking what the ideological basis might be for volunteers to become active will often be told that the work just had to be done. It is also noticeable that pursuing your own interest and helping other people are not mutually exclusive. Volunteer work has meanwhile extended to nature conservation and the protection of endangered species. There is a relationship with processes of modernisation because a good deal of volunteer work is a compensation for – or a correction of – certain negative effects of those processes. This would simply be inconceivable without moral imagination.²⁸

Flourishing social initiatives

From about ten years ago, there seems to be a new wave of social initiatives arising in the Netherlands, one that involves activities, organisations or projects that citizens themselves take up and that relate to a specific theme such as care, housing and sustainable energy. Three aspects in particular are notable here. In the first place, many initiatives seem to be local or at best regional in nature. Second, it is often entrepreneurs or enterprising individuals who are involved. Third, they like to make use of the possibilities offered by modern technology. But their relationship with modernity has more than just a technical element. They oppose the processes of privatisation that were implemented in the Netherlands from the 1980s onwards. They form a mix in which one's own interests and one's commitment to the public good coincide in a new way. They easily come into conflict with a government that tries to mould the common interest in more formal procedures. As a result, they embody a social and moral commitment that provides modern society with a positive counterbalance.²⁹

Elaboration of moral mythology

On the assumption that any mythology is concerned with a series of fictional but significant events, we see that contemporary society has a moral mythology at its disposal. We took as an example fantasy books for young people and certain television series for adults. Books targeting young people tell of the conflict between good and evil; hospital dramas

²⁸ Chapter 5, sections 7-9; chapter 9, sections 2-3.

²⁹ Chapter 9, sections 7-9.

deal with questions of life and death; crime series are concerned with the tension between power and justice. There is great interest in these forms of social description: the television series mentioned can count on millions of viewers every week. In ethical terms, these stories often run contrary to the rational, individualistic, large-scale aspects of the modern world. But at the same time, they make persuasive use of modern media. We are inclined to view the overall effect as positive because they reinforce the moral commitment of citizens. There is not much wrong with playing on the imagination in this regard, because moral sentiments cannot exist without the imagination.³⁰

Increasing sensitivity

Proceeding on the premise that moral sentiments are part of human nature (Smith), one might think that they never change. But this is clearly not the case. Moral capacities may be the product of our evolutionary prehistory, but their content depends on social situations. New sensitivities are constantly being added. Certain forms of behaviour that were regarded as perfectly normal just a few decades ago are now no longer accepted. Take the way in which many men acted towards women and the way in which people treated ethnic minorities. Another example is the way we deal with children. With the advent of professional reporting centres, the number of victims of child abuse has risen significantly in the past thirty years. This does not mean that parents have been smacking their children more but that there is better supervision and intervention at an earlier stage. We are inclined to see a general pattern here: the modernisation of society often leads to increasing sensitivity, especially where people in a vulnerable position are concerned.³¹

6 The modernisation of morality

At the beginning of this book, we posed the question whether the modernisation of society leads to an erosion of moral sentiments. It is clear from the overview just presented that we cannot answer this question with a simple yes or no. In fact, for the Netherlands we have looked at four sorts of phenomena. From some of these, one might deduce that moral values are indeed under threat, but others point to the opposite. It is noticeable that

³⁰ Chapter 8, sections 2-4 and 6-9.

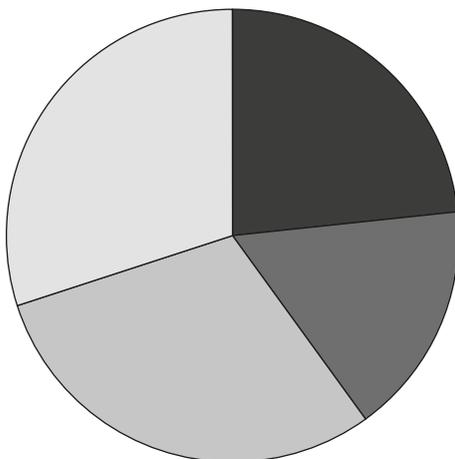
³¹ Chapter 4, sections 5-7; chapter 6, section 8.

developments that we have interpreted as ‘negative’ relate primarily to the public domain, while the more ‘positive’ developments seem to occur in the private, social and professional realms. This is in line with an observation made by Paul Schnabel a few years ago when he characterised the mood among the Dutch population as follows: ‘I’m fine but we’re in a bad way’ (*Met mij gaat het goed, met ons gaat het slecht*).³² We shall return to this peculiar discrepancy in a moment, but first let us look at the end result. This is essentially positive. We see not only that morality and modernity go well together in many cases but also that the interaction between the two entities leads to positive results. On the basis of the thirty phenomena that we have looked at in more detail, seven need to be evaluated as negative. There proved to be five phenomena in which the interaction between modernity and morality resulted in neutral or ambivalent consequences. We found nine cases where the effects were moderately positive and nine where the outcomes were markedly positive. Expressed in percentages, our conclusion is that the phenomena we have studied display a positive outcome in more than half (60 percent) of the cases, and a negative outcome in only a quarter of the total (23 percent). Figure 11.1 shows this in graphic form.

Apart from this overall balance sheet, we may draw a few general conclusions on the way in which moral values or sentiments interact with the modernisation of society. The mutual influence can be viewed in two ways, depending on what side of the interaction one starts. Thus we can start by asking how moral ideas, values or sentiments change under the influence of modern society. We shall refer succinctly to this process as the *modernisation of morality*. The Netherlands has considerable experience of this process, but it is clear that it is not restricted to this one country. In other societies, too, we see that moves towards such modern values as truth, efficiency and equality amount to an alteration of moral ideas. What, then, are the characteristics of the morality that conforms in this way to the demands or customs of a modern society? The first characteristic seems to be that a modern morality accepts all the facts, especially when these are facts it does not particularly like. Some will see this as a superfluous comment because facts, statistics and rational insight play such a crucial role in modern life. Nonetheless, time after time we find the inclination to ignore, underestimate or gloss over unpleasant facts from the point of view of moral values. It is always difficult to acknowledge that mistakes have been made. Thus European countries do not always appreciate the consequences of colonialism, church leaders sometimes cite

32 Quoted in Dekker & den Ridder 2011, p. 19.

Figure 11.1 Effects of the interaction between morality and modernity in the Netherlands (N = 30)



Note: A distinction has been made between negative effects (black), ambivalent or neutral effects (dark grey), and effects to be regarded as moderately positive (grey) or highly positive (light grey).

extenuating circumstances for the abuse of children, doctors do not like to admit their shortcomings, and politicians often maintain that they were right. In other words, the cherishing of moral ideals can lead to people not facing up to all the facts. The first commandment of a modern morality therefore says that we should take the truth absolutely seriously and that we should embrace attempts to track it down without reservations of any kind.

The second commandment concerns the freedom and equality of modern citizens. Although these principles have formed the basis of our society since the democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century, they are often not accepted by everyone at a moral level. There are still people who think that the moral considerations of their own tradition, community or social group are superior to those of others. Furthermore, some citizens use the values of their group as a shield to hide behind. The latter would amount to a less-than-modern attitude. Here we need to make a sharp distinction between the factual level and the ethical level. At the factual level, it is clear that our moral sentiments are subject to the influence of collectively shared values or norms. This is unavoidable, in fact, because one's own conscience (Adam Smith's impartial spectator) is shaped by interaction with others. In consequence, everyone who adheres to a particular ethical norm must relate

to the norms of others and thus also to what passes for normal in one's own group, community or tradition. But at the ethical level, it is crucial that one takes the individual conscience – regardless of how this came about and regardless of whether it coincides with what others consider normal – as the highest standard of reference. At this level, there is a difference between modern citizens who rely on their own counsel when taking difficult decisions and people who make their decision dependent on parents, family members, neighbours, members of their group, spiritual leaders, authorised persons or supervisors. Modern morality implies that people must never abdicate their own responsibility towards others. Incidentally, it does not then follow that we should ignore the opinion of our fellow citizens, let alone regard it with contempt. The point is that we form our own judgment and remain true to it.

This brings us to the third commandment in a modern morality. This flows directly from the previous one and says that we should show fundamental respect for the moral sentiments of others. This is about more than just the equality of citizens from a legal point of view. We have to recognise that members of modern society are motivated by different values, ideals and principles, and that there are no independent standards to determine what the 'true' worth of those values is. Here we have to watch out for certain pitfalls associated with the process of modernisation. For instance, it is frequently the case that people who themselves adhere to social ideals look down with some contempt upon others who 'still' hold to sacred or religious values. Just as adherents of religious traditions often have a problem with people who advocate vital values. It is a stubborn misunderstanding to think that one of these families of values has preferential rights in modern life. How can one say that those who devote themselves to society or their fellow human beings are 'more modern' than those who embrace a religious ideal or try to live a healthy lifestyle? The only thing one can say is that modernity offers space for all these ideals and that from a moral point of view it is not a question of the content but of the intention behind these ideals. There even needs to be space for people who turn their backs on modernity itself and deliberately opt for a traditional value or identity. This space is only limited by what is prohibited in law. But within those boundaries, the fundamental equality of all basic values (both modern and anti-modern) must be acknowledged.

The two last commandments are closely connected with the modern pursuit of such things as efficiency and economies of scale. In a modern morality, citizens are expected to act as entrepreneurs. By 'entrepreneurship', we mean not so much the form of business as a mentality or attitude. This is

an attitude in which one takes initiatives of one's own, not waiting for others to take the first step. One is prepared to take risks and seizes opportunities when they arise. A key aspect of entrepreneurship is to realise one's own ideals and to try to achieve a visible result. It is not enough to pay lip service to particular values; one needs to translate them into practical action. A disadvantage of this attitude is that one is frequently confronted with legal rules, institutional routines and formal procedures. Viewed from the point of view of the system, many entrepreneurs are headstrong or obstinate. We have argued above that citizens are taking this entrepreneurial attitude more and more, and here we contend that this also has consequences for the way they deal with moral values. They make it a priority to realise their moral values and pay small regard to the institutional or formal rules they come up against. This also means that thinking about ethical norms and values is no longer the monopoly of moral specialists. The conversation about morality has, as it were, shifted from Sunday to the working week. Modern morality cannot be locked up in a separate domain that the average citizen has no understanding of: it has pervaded everyday work and has for many people become an integral part of professional life. The consequence is that there is a close link between talking about ideals and talking about practices in modern life.

The last characteristic of a modern morality is that the circle of engagement is gradually expanding. This relates to the many ways in which people are connected in the modern world. It is no longer possible to confine moral commitment to a national horizon or to limit it to the social groups we are associated with. In principle, the circles of identification in today's world are broader than they once were. They even extend to outside the human race, as illustrated in efforts to support endangered species and other forms of life. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that there is a difference between people to whom our moral sentiments extend 'in principle' and those groups of people that we are actually connected with. It depends mainly on the imagination. Every day, thanks to the news, a hefty helping of human misery penetrates us without really touching us. The trigger for the awakening of our moral sympathy is the question of whether we allow ourselves to be affected by the lot of our fellow human beings. It is not so much a matter of hard facts or rational insights but rather of a graphic image and the fact that we get closer to our fellow human beings in the imagination, bringing our capacity for empathy into action. Whether we convert these feelings into practical action often depends on all sorts of accidental factors, but clearly we are moved to do something. On the other hand, it means that – knowing that we share a common basis of moral

sentiments with all humans of different cultures and other eras – we are more often affected by the judgment of these other people. Just as they come into the view of the modern citizen, so the actions of the modern citizen also become more visible to them: sooner or later they will form their own opinion of those actions. This means that the point of view of the impartial spectator contains a more extensive collection of human experiences than in the time of Adam Smith and that we are in a better position than we used to be to do justice to ‘all people’.

So much for our sketch of what a ‘modernisation of morality’ might be. Reduced to a few key points, this modernisation boils down to the fact that we cherish our moral values but also expose them to the facts, that we as individuals defend our own principles, that we show fundamental respect for the moral values of others, that we realise our ideals in everyday life and that we are receptive to the experiences of people beyond our own horizons. We realise that a programme like this makes considerable demands of us, and we are prepared for the fact that the realisation of them will require a great deal of time and effort. But this does not alter the fact that the contours of a productive interaction between morality and modernity can be indicated.

7 The moralisation of modernity

In our description of thirty phenomena occurring in Dutch society, we find several elements of a modern morality. But it would be naive to believe that the interaction between moral values and modern society is unidirectional. In fact, we can perceive a certain moralisation of modernity. What in broad terms would this process look like? We shall limit ourselves to sketching five shifts.

The first has to do with the moving apart of authority and power. In Max Weber’s classic theory set out a century ago, authority was understood as a specific form of the exercise of power. For a number of decades, more attention has now been paid in the literature to the difference between authority and power.³³ Following a definition by Robert Dahl, we could describe power as a relationship between A and B whereby A can make B do something that B would not do on his own account.³⁴ In comparison,

33 A more detailed treatment of the differences between power and authority can be found in De Mare et al. 2014, chapter I.

34 Quoted in Wolf 2001, p. 973 and McFarland 2001, p. 11936-11937.

we may describe authority as a relationship between A and B whereby A commissions B with a task that is carried out voluntarily by B. Viewed in this way, there are both similarities and differences between authority and power. In both cases, there is a hierarchical relationship between two parties. But power is characterised by forms of coercion, while in the case of authority it is a matter of voluntary obedience. Another difference is that power often harks back to a position, a function or an organisation, while authority is more closely associated with the involvement of a person. Authority has to be earned, and this can only occur by engaging in dialogue with the adherents, while power is a more structural given and relies on a monologue: the boss says what has to happen and anyone who refuses to obey is put under pressure. The biggest difference is that a person with authority and his or her followers have specific values in common with each other, while that is not necessarily the case with power. In essence, the voluntary acceptance of authority relies on the idea that the person with authority stands for specific qualities and that it is worth following him or her. The wielding of authority is unavoidably ethical in nature, and it is this side of things that we as modern citizens have been emphasising more in recent decades.³⁵ Many well-educated, articulate and democratically thinking citizens are inclined to see power as a necessary evil: something that always exists but which from a moral point of view is suspect, if not reprehensible. Authority, on the other hand, requires that someone succeeds in embodying certain qualities, not the least important of which are moral virtues.³⁶ It is primarily in modern countries with an egalitarian culture that we see this division between authority and power.³⁷

A second shift is that from procedure to personality. To appreciate the relevance of this, we need to realise that most organisations and institutions still work in a bureaucratic manner. This means, for one thing, that employees' actions are set down in guidelines or procedures and that as

35 Jansen et al. 2012, p. 296-317; see also Hajer 2009.

36 Van Vugt & Wildschut 2012.

37 One might say that in authoritarian cultures there is a positive correlation between authority and power, in the sense that an increase in power results directly or indirectly in growing authority. The situation in egalitarian cultures is quite different, as there is often an inverse proportion between authority and power. It means that officials who have a position of power already have difficulty gaining public esteem for that reason alone, while those who themselves defend moral values or other ideals are inclined to maintain a certain distance from the ruling power. Given all this, it seems that the 'irreconcilability' of authority and power is not an eternally or universally valid axiom. It is an axiom associated with specific cultural environments and also with certain periods of time (Hofstede 1991).

far as possible functional relations are stripped of personal elements. It is precisely this formal way of working that has given modern businesses, large organisations and state institutions a high degree of efficiency.³⁸ There is no room at all in this scenario for moral sentiments. But for some decades now, this has been changing. We see that employees are asking for more attention to moral considerations, not only in their professional behaviour but also in relation to personal matters and the significance they attach to their work. Moreover, many citizens, students, patients, voters or neighbours nowadays are paying attention to the person behind the professional and the way in which they are treated. Thus moral expectations and preferences are playing an increasingly important role in professional life. A professional who relies exclusively on the fact that he or she has followed all the rules is still able to offer a defence in court. But whether the public will appreciate such a stance is an entirely different matter. In any case, many of the phenomena discussed above show us that moral sentiments are gaining in significance in modern Dutch society. We return, as it were, to the thinking of Adam Smith, who emphasises that morality is a question of individual virtues that need to be manifested in personal relationships.

Our third shift relates to the scale of many modern institutions. For a long time, businesses, professional organisations and government institutions strove for economies of scale, convinced that this would bring advantages in terms of greater efficiency. What clients and citizens thought of this was not always clear. Among citizens themselves, it is striking that for the past ten years or so many initiatives have been searching precisely for a smaller scale. They use modern means of communication to form local or regional communities. There are a range of reasons for doing this. Sometimes, initiators are looking for a form of human reciprocity that has long since disappeared in the anonymous institutions. Or they work together locally in order to have more control over their environment. And it is not just citizens who are doing this. There are also many professionals who are deliberately distancing themselves from the system in which they work. They are discovering that, as a professional, you need to put yourself in the world of ordinary people if you want to tackle serious problems.³⁹ In

38 Weber 1922, p. 652, 657, 661-664, 677-678.

39 We mean the functioning of so-called 'best persons': citizens, administrators or professionals who have had notable success in tackling issues in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Part of their secret lies in the combination of involvement and entrepreneurship. Another part is that they do not allow themselves to be locked up either in a government system or in the world of citizens. They move constantly back and forth between these two worlds. A development of this topic may be found in Van den Brink et al. 2012c.

addition, the many societies, associations and foundations belonging to civil society like to be active on a local or at most regional level. At first sight, this tendency is at odds with the broadening of the moral horizon just mentioned. However, an important difference is that worldwide forms of engagement are often of short duration, while in the case of these local commitments, people often work together over long periods of time. They seek an emotional counterbalance to the global tendencies that characterise the contemporary world. This brings with it a certain moralisation of society because moral sentiments present themselves primarily where personal relationships are concerned.

The fourth transition relates primarily to professional life. We mentioned already that modern society has a preference for rational and efficient ways of working. As a result, this modern professional practice has been very much associated with technical skills. A good professional was one who had the technical aspects and special skills of the particular profession at one's fingertips. For the past two decades, we observe an expansion of this way of looking at things. 'Good work' nowadays means not only the special skill dimension of a profession but also the question of how it relates to public values. Is sufficient justice done to such things as fairness, sustainability, accessibility, etc.? More attention is given to dealings with the public. How do things stand with regard to honesty, propriety, treatment of people, etc.? And finally, more emphasis is placed on the significance of the work for the professionals themselves. What value does it have for their personal development, does it make the best use of their talents, and does it meet the ethical standards they set for themselves? As a result, the exercise of a profession now involves more than technical-economic aspects. It has developed into a socio-ethical task in which moral sentiments, personal values and professional ideals play a large part. It is clear that this does not make the job any easier. Modern professionals are confronted almost on a daily basis with the complex question of finding the right balance between technical, legal, personal, financial and moral considerations. The dialogue on this complicated balancing act often leaves much to be desired. The fact remains, however, that the moral dimension of modern work is increasingly being felt, so that new challenges arise.

The last shift we discern is a transition from rules to principles. The emphasis on guiding human behaviour by means of rules is something that has only quite recently come into fashion. It was partly a reaction to the forms of anti-social behaviour that emanate from modern life itself – for example, the assertive lifestyle that offers plenty of room for individual self-reliance and little room for collective regulation. To limit

the downsides associated with this behaviour, in the 1990s people began to set up general rules of behaviour. The expectation was that in this way it would be possible to direct both the actions of private individuals and the actions of professional workers as well as the actions of managers. But however 'modern' this approach was, on the whole it seems to have been ineffective. In many domains it turned out to be counterproductive because the rules, usually imposed from above, had little clout. Moreover, experienced citizens or professionals can put a spin on things so that it looks as if the rules in question have been followed when from a moral point of view the results have turned out badly. So it is not surprising that, for the past ten years or so, we have been hearing new calls for virtues, values and inner principles. These would offer a better guarantee of moral behaviour than the many regulations and protocols that we are now familiar with. Another advantage of guiding behaviour on the basis of principles would be that this is a better way to do justice to the rich variation we have become familiar with in modern life. Quite often general rules that apply to any situation turn out to be an obstacle. But guidance by principles also comes at a price. It means that people must give up the illusion of complete control and accept certain risks. It also requires a capacity for improvisation, because one has to decide what values have priority depending on the particular situation and issue at hand. This requires a moral resilience that is not granted to all.

It goes without saying that these five shifts are related. What they have in common is that they show the relevance of moral sentiments for modern life. They illustrate that the modernisation of society is not an unambiguous movement that only leads to a reduction or adaptation of moral values. As we assumed in chapter 2 on theoretical grounds, there is also a converse development in which moral forces offer a response to modernity. We would include among these forces the rise of regional communities, the recognition of ethical elements in the practice of one's profession, the guiding of behaviour by means of principles, the valuing of personal relations and the emphasis on the distinction between authority and power. Although it is only a matter of tendencies and shifts, their direction is relevant. They illustrate that a certain moralisation of modern life is underway – a development that is at variance with current thinking about modernity but which can indeed ensure that modern society retains a human character.

8 A void in the public domain

A footnote needs to be attached to this optimistic conclusion. The moral counterbalances we have sketched are manifest in many areas besides the public realm. It is even the case that most expressions of moral erosion – the existence of which cannot be denied – occur precisely in the public domain. Take the process of secularisation and the marginal role that churches play in present-day society. No doubt they do much good from a moral point of view, but their role as champions of public morality has had its day. We might also think of the assertive lifestyle that has developed since the 1970s and which often has ambivalent consequences in public life. It means, after all, that on the one hand citizens attach more importance to their own rights, interests, liberties and opinions while on the other hand they are more often offended by fellow citizens doing the same thing. As a result, both the demand for individual self-reliance and the experience of annoyance are on the rise. Both tendencies are very evident in the public domain, with the result that little attention is then paid to moral sentiments. How is this development to be explained?

One does not need to know much about political history to know that the modern state opts for a neutral stance with regard to morality. This began already in the early modern period when the state took on the role of guardian of the social order in Europe, torn apart as it was by religious conflicts. It persisted in the nineteenth century, when more and more states opted for the separation of church and state. This path seems to have been altered in the first half of the twentieth century when civic life in various countries – including the Netherlands – came under the heavy influence of political, religious or ideological engagement. But after the appalling experiences of the Second World War, people everywhere in the West turned back to a neutral stance of the state. In the democratic constitution we have cherished since then, moral choices by the government and its civil servants have been, in practice, taboo. This is where Rawls' liberal thinking begins, where the state makes no statements of any kind about right and wrong.⁴⁰ This applies fully to public life in the Netherlands, except for the fact that religious groups rejecting the separation of church and state have

40 Since the publication of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, liberal thinkers are of the opinion that the government needs to take a neutral position between rival views in relation to good and evil. The government should not align itself behind this or that ethical viewpoint but would do better to leave its citizens free to follow their own ethical course as long as others also have the same freedom (Skidelsky & Skidelsky 2012, p. 124).

been tolerated for a long time. But an end is gradually coming to that, too. In the past two decades, there has been much debate about civil servants refusing to perform marriages between homosexuals because they have personal difficulty with this, and similarly there has been much debate on the question of whether a Muslim woman in public services should be allowed to wear a headscarf. Regardless of the arguments presented in these debates, the general thrust is clear: the democratic state maintains a strict neutrality in the ideological realm, and judgments about right and wrong are not to be expected of it.

Thus we see that one of the modern basic principles in the public sphere has long been applied. State and politics are built upon the fundamental equality of every religious or moral engagement. This applies just as much to the two other principles. The work of Max Weber has taught us that the functioning of the state bureaucracy relies on a rational way of working in which any moral or personal aspect is eliminated. This was also the premise when the welfare state came into being in the Netherlands and other European countries.⁴¹ A scheme of rights and responsibilities was formed in which no moral questions were asked. The workings of this scheme were to a large degree a technical matter requiring a great deal of legal, economic and sociological expertise but no moral judgments. This became even stronger when the costs of the scheme shot up in the 1980s and intervention became unavoidable. Many countries opted for a liberal strategy in which large parts of the public sector were privatised in the hope that the market would do its job. This strategy was extended to the state itself with the introduction of the 'new public management' philosophy: by adapting working methods from business life to the government, all sorts of stubborn problems would resolve themselves. Public services were described as a 'product', citizens were regarded primarily as 'customers' and everywhere one could see the pursuit of 'more efficiency'. A recent study of the whys and wherefores of these interventions makes it clear that in the Netherlands, they fell short of expectations. What is more, public interests were pressed at various points and the political organs were unable to do their work.⁴² Moral considerations never played a part in this. In fact, it is the case that with this wave of liberalisation, the last moral values that the welfare state still took for granted were washed out of the public domain.

In view of all this, it should not come as a surprise that public life in the Netherlands looks particularly bare from a moral point of view. Justice, state

41 De Swaan 1989, p. 224-262.

42 Kuiper 2012, p. 5-15.

and democracy have been modernised, but there has been no provision of moral counterbalances of any sort. This is also evident when one looks at the modernisation of the business of politics itself. Thus in parliament we find more and more professional politicians, that is to say people who have made a career out of politics. Experience with the functioning of governments, with the workings of a democratic organ or with the running of public institutions became a necessary precondition for a career in politics. Over the years, a noticeable shift took place in the recruiting of political staff in that it became more and more common for insiders to be appointed. Those who have a political or governmental role in the Netherlands are generally socialised according to the routines and norms of the political process. The many skills a professional politician needs to have can only be acquired in that process itself. Moreover, working as a politician became a full-time job, leaving little time for non-political activities.⁴³ This – in combination with the high educational standard of most politicians – led to an decoupling of the political class from other social domains. According to Bovens and Wille, a process of meritocratisation got underway. As a result, the social distance between legislative and executive authority on the one hand and large sections of the general public on the other has widened significantly over the years. In any case, many Dutch citizens are convinced that their parliamentarians live in a world of their own, one that has little connection with reality.⁴⁴

This set of issues is known in the Netherlands as the ‘gulf’ between citizens and politics. It is noticeable that the problem is interpreted very differently by both sides of the gulf. Many politicians and representatives hold to a view that was in vogue in the Netherlands until long after the Second World War. It holds that, certainly, one has been voted in by the people, but as a representative of the people one has a responsibility of one’s own and so does not have to go along with all the moods of the people. Many present-day voters are for exactly the opposite view of the role and think that representatives should do primarily what the people demand of them. In essence, this difference of opinion boils down to an opposition between ‘bottom-up representation’ and ‘top-down representation’. While four out of five voters in the Netherlands are in favour of the first model, most parliamentarians favour the second. More generally, most politicians think that it is their task to develop proposals that are then presented to the electorate for approval. Anyone who looks at this situation from a republican point of view on citizenship might say that although in the Netherlands rule is *for* the people, it is *by* the people to a

43 Bovens & Wille 2009, p. 54-57.

44 Bovens & Wille 2009, p. 69.

much smaller degree. While the so called 'diploma-democracy' offers too little space for political engagement by the citizenry in general, this applies all the more to citizens with a low level of education.⁴⁵ In fact, the growth in the number of professional politicians points to a modernisation of politics. Working in politics and government is not just for anyone and everyone. You need to have a large number of specific skills at your fingertips and are admitted to the profession only after a lengthy process of selection and socialisation. The political parties have a decisive voice in the latter. Although no more than 2.4 percent of the Dutch electorate are members of a party, this membership forms an important precondition for starting work in public administration. This means that a considerable proportion of the professional administration is recruited from a minimal portion of the electorate.

While the recruiting of professional politicians, administrators and representatives constitutes a classic function of political parties, other sorts of functions are much less well filled. After the depillarisation of Dutch society, for example, the relationship between political parties and their social hinterland has been eroded. In the first half of the twentieth century, political parties were massive organisations that put these social groups in a position to participate in political life.⁴⁶ The function has declined considerably in the past forty years because most parties directed their attention to the administrative-political system and not to society. They underwent a process of 'statification' in which success in the internal administrative world became more important than credibility in the outside world of society. One might also say that they switched from a 'people's mode' to a 'state mode'. In the first modality, parties appear as representatives of specific interests, and in the second modality, they defend the common interest. This attitude does come at a price. In the elections, parties who have had administrative responsibility in the previous government are rarely rewarded. More often, they are in fact punished. Other functions of parties such as the organising of social groups, the drafting of a consistent programme or the developing of a specific ideological profile are carried out to a much lesser degree. So it is not surprising that many people are noting that political parties seem to have lost their function. We should not expect much more from the political parties than the provision of professional administrators, they say. In terms of the set of questions we are dealing with in this book, what is relevant is that political parties contribute little to the formulation of a public morality. They hardly refer to moral values, and a

45 Bovens & Wille 2009, p. 69-71.

46 Bovens & Wille 2009, p. 29, 56.

relation to political practice is missing. Incidentally, this does not seem to come as a surprise to the population. Many administrators, politicians and representatives think they are doing a good job, but public regard for political parties is at a low. While 70 percent of Dutch citizens are content with the functioning of democracy, only 40 percent are satisfied with the way the political parties are doing their job.⁴⁷ That is the price they pay of identifying with government actions.

Besides these structural changes in the business of politics, there is another development that has ensured that justice is rarely done to moral values, namely the fact that political life has become the province of the highly educated. Mark Bovens and Annechrit Wille call this 'diploma democracy'. Their research shows that the higher educated are three times as politically engaged as lower educated people. They participate more often in elections, commit themselves more readily to citizens' initiatives, show more interest in politics, etc. One of the reasons for this is that cognitive, linguistic and communicational skills figure prominently in democratic politics, and that higher educated citizens generally have more experience of it than less well-educated people.⁴⁸ After the Second World War, the old elite of well-off families made room for people from the middle class who gained access to the upper echelons of society by means of hard work. This is seen partly in the composition of parliament. In the second half of the twentieth century, there were many parliamentarians who had obtained a higher education.⁴⁹ Based on the level of education of its members, the Dutch parliament is 'extremely elitist' according to Bovens and Wille. Until the mid-1980s, the Netherlands was one of the European countries where a relatively high proportion of ministers had a university degree.⁵⁰ In fact, Dutch politics shows all the traits of a system of meritocracy in which the influence of highly educated Dutch people on the cabinet, the parliament and the political agenda is overwhelming.⁵¹ It shouldn't surprise us, then, that highly educated and less well-educated people look rather differently upon the political class (see fig. 11.2).

47 De Lange et al. 2014, p. 5, 10-13.

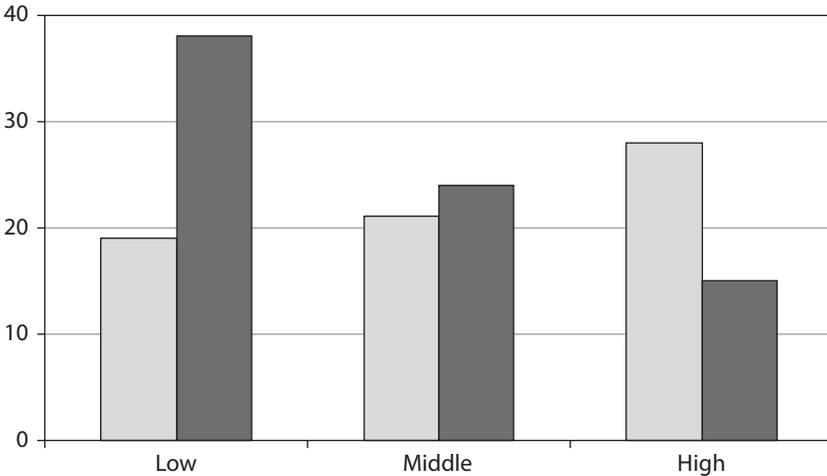
48 Bovens & Wille 2009, p. 30-37. For the sake of completeness, we would point out that the connection between political participation and higher educated citizens as described by these authors was discussed earlier (Van den Brink 2002, p. 55-86).

49 Bovens & Wille 2009, p. 52, 62.

50 Bovens & Wille 2009, p. 46-47. Here, incidentally, we see an interesting shift towards areas of expertise. While until well into the twentieth century, ministers tended to have a background in law, between 1967 and 1995 they seemed more often to be economists and in later years more often social scientists (p. 52-53).

51 Bovens & Wille 2009, p. 79-80.

Figure 11.2 Opinions of politicians (percent) according to level of education (low, middle, high) in 2006



Note: data retrieved from Bovens and Wille 2009 p. 82. The options given were: 'Politicians are reliable' (light grey) and 'You can't trust what politicians say' (dark grey).

We see that political life in the Netherlands relies primarily on a mix of knowledge and the exercise of power. The exercise of power has indeed been modernised: people take seriously such principles as equality, rationality and efficiency. Hence legal, economic and social insights play a prominent role. Furthermore, over the years the business of politics has become a professional affair: politicians have focused largely on administrative actions and the demands that are placed on them. It meant that the flow of social needs, experiences and values into the administrative world stagnated. Partly for this reason, moral sentiments and ideals – which are fully present in society itself – do not assert themselves in the political realm.⁵² This applies especially to the moral values of lower educated Dutch citizens.

⁵² That moral principles play a marginal role in political life has everything to do with the increasing dominance of economic thinking. Economics sees itself as a value-free science. Through the influence of economic thinking in the public sphere, thinking about a constitutional state and democracy is also quickly taking on a value-free form. As a result, many politicians are focused on procedures and means: they prefer to say nothing on the question of what values or goals are really important. In fact, ethical notions of the good life in modern society are rarely articulated. In the view of Robert and Edward Skidelsky, this is not only a damaging development but a rather strange one. In any case, the expansion of money was not absolutised in earlier civilisations. Aristotle's view was that wealth should be in the service of a good life. The

9 The idealistic side of politics

One might ask whether this is a real problem. Perhaps this state of affairs is even to be welcomed, given that moral ideals in political life often turn out badly.⁵³ This view has a long and respectable history. From Thrasymachus and Machiavelli to Schmidt and Kissinger, there have always been those who have pleaded for a more realistic view of politics. They contend that the exercise of power has nothing to do with moral ideals or ethical principles.⁵⁴ History has shown time and time again that they are right: it presents an endless series of wars and conflicts in which the only concern was winning or losing and in which ideals were applied at best in an instrumental way. Nevertheless, politics has always been an attempt to create social order.⁵⁵ This effort has not been without success since the emergence of the modern state, and – at least in the realm of domestic politics – it has led to relatively peaceful and stable societies. So we would do well to regard political life as a mixed reality: a domain where the creation of social order on the one hand and the battling-out of power conflicts on the other are always connected.⁵⁶ This view follows on from the work of Maurice Duverger, who emphasised that politics basically is a double-edged sword: on the one hand political acts stem from fighting, conflicts and inequalities between groups or individuals, while on the other hand it is directed towards the creation of social order, the promotion of justice and the formulation of what we call the ‘public good’.⁵⁷

This view links up with our other passages on the transcendental order and the way it is treated in the West. At the beginning of our account, we sketched the contention that Western thinking has always displayed a dialectic in which the divine and the human, power and morality, the sacred and the profane, forms of idealism and realism, etc. constantly challenge and hound one another. Thus it became impossible to resolve the tension

Catholic Church taught that economic activity was subordinate to higher goals. However great the difference was between the ancient cultures of Europe, India and China, the expansion of money as an end in itself was universally rejected (Skidelsky & Skidelsky 2013, p. 103-117, 124-133).

53 Dramatic examples are the forms of mass politics that developed in the first half of the twentieth century, such as fascism, communism and other anti-democratic movements. In these movements, social, political and moral ideas were exploited by politicians. Their dreadful consequences have led to a deep distrust of any ideal and all ideology in many Western countries. With the present study, we hope to free ourselves from this paralysing situation.

54 Machiavelli 1976.

55 Terpstra 2012, p. 91-169; see also Fukuyama 2012.

56 Mouffe 2005.

57 Duverger 1970, p. 20.

between the transcendental and the immanent order by opting for one side. Neither opting completely for the transcendent (and thus a complete detachment from worldly existence) and opting completely for secular activity (in which transcendence is fully invested) were ever dominant in the West. What dominated here was a constant discord in which people tried to realise values, ideals or principles even as reality and ideals kept separating over and over again. The unease and disquiet that this produced continued into modern life. It is even the case that one can only understand modern dynamics by assuming this tension from the start. This applies equally to modern politics, which comprises both an ethical and a factual component.⁵⁸ Politics can therefore also be viewed as the most suitable way for a society to give shape to its ideals. This view reverberates in the description that Talcott Parsons gave half a century ago when he said the following: ‘We treat a phenomenon as political in so far as it involves the organization and mobilization of resources for the attainment of the goals of a particular community.’⁵⁹ Although the organisation of resources (including the many conflicts that arise from this) plays a key role in this vision, political activity cannot be confined to something technocratic: it is also a question of the goals a community sets itself. We find the same duality in David Easton’s famous definition, for whom politics was the authoritative allocation of values.⁶⁰ If a similar view is maintained of political activity, then the ethical dimension is unavoidable. Before returning to the condition of public life in the Netherlands, we shall offer four arguments as to why this is so.

The first reason is that Easton is speaking of an *authoritative* allocation of values. So it is not a question of a distribution of values imposed upon the population by a powerful institution (government, elite, dictator, etc.) and even less of something that flows from the interplay between equal parties (as in markets, associations, friendship, etc.). The allocating institution must have the authority needed so that the allocation will be accepted by the majority of citizens. Now – as we have indicated above – we can only speak of authority if followers and those in authority have one (or more) value(s) in common with each other. More than that: the follower believes that his own values are embodied in an exemplary way in the authoritative person, and it is for this reason that he voluntarily follows his instructions. This applies for the apprentice who carries out a task for his master, for the patient who

58 Antonio Gramsci has argued, among other things, that politics cannot be understood if one disregards its ‘intellectual and moral dimension’ (Gramsci 1980).

59 Parsons 1971, p. 16.

60 Easton 1960, p. 132; see also Tromp 2007, p. 14-19, 134-135, 137-138.

accepts a prescription from the medical specialist, for the defendant who submits to the verdict given by the judge, for the young entrepreneur who takes the advice of the successful businessman to heart, for the readers who follow the judgment of a famous writer, etc. For administrators and politicians, it means that they are only granted authority if they show evidence of a number of classical virtues. Their actions must sufficiently display caution, justice, moderation or courage because otherwise there will be many subordinates who take it simply as the wielding of power. This was evident half a century ago because political life was then largely determined by constitutional and democratic institutions, with the personal appearance of politicians being as it were the derivative. In that situation, politicians could borrow their authority from the institutions where they worked and the function they performed. That is less frequently the case nowadays. But that does not detract from the fact that the authoritative allocation of values assumes more than power and that politicians must also embody a number of virtues besides a sense of reality.

The second reason is that politics in Easton's definition is about the allocation of *values*. A distinction can be made here between material and immaterial goods. It is true of both sorts that in general they are unequally distributed between social groups. A modern society nonetheless places certain demands on the distribution of those goods, in the sense that every political policy must meet the principles of efficiency, equality and truth. Modern citizens take it that the figures behind the policy are reliable, that politicians in principle act honestly and that they keep their promises. Now everyone knows that these expectations are never fully met, but this does not mean that they are a waste of time. What we have here is a mix in which the importance of certain ideals is not lost just because they are only partly realised.⁶¹ This also applies to the pursuit of equal treatment. It is unavoidable that the allocation of values should lead to inequality between groups or persons. But the inequality should be kept within limits so as not to prompt protests in society. What degree of inequality is still acceptable and what is not depends on the society itself. If one looks at the division of income in the Netherlands and the United States, for example, the differences are immediately apparent. But in both cases, politicians keep an eye on the accompanying sensitivities. This applies all the more to the struggle for efficiency, an ideal that has become extremely important in both business and public life, and which no politician can ignore. It illustrates that the allocation of social values has both realistic and idealistic

61 See also Van den Burg 2001.

sides to it. To understand what politics is about, one needs to keep both sides in view.⁶²

That moral values and ideal principles play a role in political life follows already from the definition that Easton set out half a century ago. Since then, developments have also occurred which – and this is the third argument – have reinforced the ethical dimension of the business of politics even further. Thus, for their credibility, politicians can no longer build upon the role they play in the constitutional state and democracy. That someone has an important political function in no way guarantees that he or she enjoys public regard. More than ever, credibility needs to be earned, and the impression one makes plays a prominent role in this. This is evident, among other things, in the book *Credibility* published twenty years ago by Kouzes and Posner. They observed that respondents consistently ascribed particular qualities to credible leaders. Most frequently mentioned were competence (58 percent), inspiration (68 percent), vision (71 percent) and honesty (87 percent). That the last of these values is so important has to do with the meaning of such terms as ‘credit’ and ‘credibility’, which derive from the Latin *credere*, to ‘believe’. People have or are given credit if they keep their promises. Such people are taken at their word: we know they will do what they say they will. And a leader must propagate his or her own values. He has to make clear what his ideals are, what goals he believes in, what principles he stands for and what sacrifices he will make in defence of these values. Finally, the difference between word and deed should not become too great. Even if full realisation of an ideal is not granted to mortals, leaders must still make a serious effort in that direction. The principles they propagate must be discernible in their actions.⁶³ This view of credibility is not only set out in Kouzes and Posner’s book, it is also discussed in Hanke Lange’s book on ‘administrative credibility’ (*Bestuurlijke geloofwaardigheid*).⁶⁴ The authors mentioned above regard honest and reliable action as a *sine qua non* for credible leadership.⁶⁵

62 The claim that politics in modern society should fulfil such principles as efficiency, equality and truth automatically means that political life has ethical sides to it. We are not denying that modern politics is based on values. The difficulty is that these are absolutely modern values and that (as we argued in chapter 1) they should not be automatically identified with moral values.

63 Kouzes & Posner 2003, p. 16-17, 21-27, 31-45, 68-69.

64 Lange 2004, p. 32-37.

65 An intriguing issue is why the credibility of leaders and politicians has become more important. The public could also restrict themselves to the realisation that was put into words already by Machiavelli, namely that many politicians have the skill of looking good without behaving well. Evidently, public expectations in this area have risen. We think that this change can be explained from the emergence of a ‘fluid society’ (see chapter 3). It is precisely at times

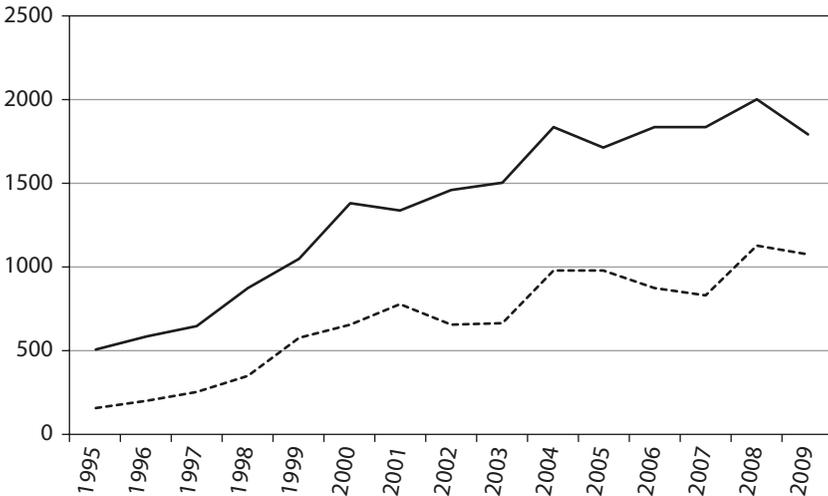
And so we come to the last reason why the ideal dimension of political life should not be underestimated. We have seen that expectations in the ethical realm are increasing slowly but surely in modern society. The ideal of 'good citizenship' in present-day Dutch society comprises more qualifications than half a century ago. The already low acceptability of such vices as tax fraud, the acceptance of bribes, telling lies or committing adultery, has steadily declined further in recent decades. Disapproval of anti-social and deviant behaviour has gone up. On the other hand, the significance of work has actually grown, the concern being mainly with the intrinsic and ideal aspects of work. In other words, the Netherlands and other modern societies show not only that norms and values have changed but that they are more explicit than they were a few decades ago. This is highly relevant for administrators and politicians. It means, after all, that attention is constantly being paid to the values they propagate. Moreover, attention is being paid to whether political actions are in agreement or at odds with these values. This affects not only the professional side of life as a politician; private life is relevant, too. All things considered, expectations as to honest and reliable behaviour by politicians are gradually rising. This has led to a call for 'more transparency' (see fig. 11.3). Although it is often unclear what is behind this call, it is noticeable that it is being heard more and more frequently in public life.⁶⁶

10 Schism in the public sphere

Assuming that political life is always based on a mixture of power and morality, we might expect that in a modern society such as that of the Netherlands, both elements would come into their own. We would hope that people would shape both the exercise of power and the propagation of moral values in a modern way. But that is certainly not the case. It is almost

when everything is in motion and people follow the most divergent courses of action that we want to know whether they are honest and trustworthy. A further development of this idea may be found in Van den Brink 2015.

66 Scholtes observes that 'transparency' in political-governmental debates usually has positive connotations. The demand for transparency is viewed increasingly as a cure-all for many questions that the authorities have to wrestle with. According to her, it is doubtful whether this is true, for two reasons. First, in the business of politics there are many situations where preference is given to secrecy or privacy. Precisely in the area of government and politics, complete honesty can sometimes turn out badly. Second, in actual usage transparency is associated with divergent stories (Scholtes 2012).

Figure 11.3 Use of the term 'transparent' in the Netherlands

Note: A distinction is made according to the number of mentions of 'transparent' in national newspapers (continuous line) and in parliamentary papers (dotted line).

Source: Scholtes 2012, p. 5 and 6

as though the modernisation of public life and forms of moral engagement are excluding each other, with the result that contemporary politics is now coloured entirely by technocratic, economic and administrative motives.

This is all the more regrettable in that public expectations in relation to political life are themselves especially ethically charged. In the discussion above, we saw that credible politicians must meet two sorts of conditions. On the one hand, they are expected to do justice to modern principles. In the eyes of the public, they must give an honest impression and never try to make things look better than they are. In addition, they need to know what they are doing, look efficient and – where possible – demonstrate tangible results. Finally, they need to keep a watchful eye on the equal treatment of diverse groups of people. On the other hand, leaders, administrators and politicians are expected to propagate a particular vision: they must show what values they are defending. Then words are not enough: they need to put these values into practice themselves (or at any rate make an attempt to do so), and they must keep their promises. Although it cannot be said that Dutch politicians fully meet expectations on the first level, many citizens do recognise that they take a professional approach in this area. The difficulty is more that leaders, administrators and politicians fall short on the second level. Or at any rate that their efforts in the ethical realm barely

trickle through to the general public.⁶⁷ This means that there is a substantial difference between what many ordinary Dutch people expect of politics on the one hand, and the way in which professional politicians conduct themselves on the other. As a result, politics is falling short in its task of giving shape in the public domain to the many and often contradictory moral aspirations that exist on the level of social reality. This is, of course, not a specifically Dutch problem; we find it in many modern democracies.

Nonetheless, political life in the Netherlands has a few peculiarities that ensure that the above-mentioned void is strongly felt here.⁶⁸ The likelihood of an arbitrary citizen recognising his or her moral values in the actions of an administrator or politician is relatively small. There are many circumstances contributing to this. The first is that Dutch citizens make their aspirations with regard to public affairs felt by electing every four years one candidate who is to represent all their preferences. As a rule, this candidate belongs to a political party and so is recruited from a particularly small segment (less than 3 percent) of the total electorate. In addition, the voter has no influence on the list of candidates, because this is set by the parties. This factor alone makes it rather unlikely that elected politicians will precisely represent the ethical preferences among the Dutch population. But even if the elected person does opt for a clear ethical position, there is still little chance that this will be translated into political actions. The Dutch political landscape is so fragmented that coalitions are always required for forming a government. Usually, no single party can truly implement its agenda: in order to participate in the government, compromises are inescapable. This is not just a matter of numbers, by the way, it is also a firm feature of the Dutch political culture. Ruling parties prefer to exclude no one; they try to achieve a broad base and practise the art of wheeling and dealing with gusto.⁶⁹ The consequence is that, in practice, ideals in government are quickly watered down, and it generally takes a great deal of effort to clarify what the often painstakingly negotiated compromises are actually about. Finally, there is the fact that most parliamentarians and politicians take their own responsibilities very seriously. They may have been elected by the people but (as we indicated above) they are not very keen to give an account of themselves to the people along the way. Responsibility for the

67 We do not deny, of course, that many civil servants, administrators and politicians are committed to the public cause out of ideal motives. But most of them are not in a position to show this. They seem to believe that the public are convinced mainly by statistics and rational considerations and that ethical engagement is 'a thing of the past'.

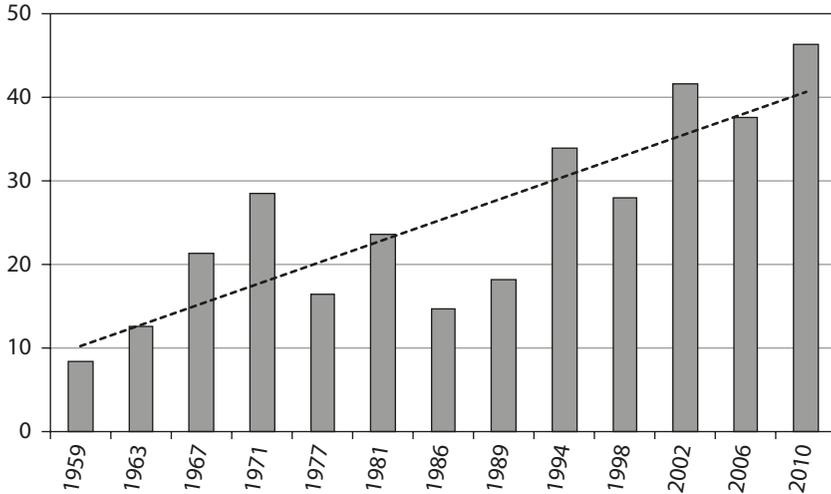
68 We have dealt with this topic earlier in Denktank VNG 2013, p. 58-61.

69 Toonen & Hendriks 1998, p. 219-233.

continuity of the government generally is at the top of the list, and purely moral principles are a bit of an inconvenience.

As a result of all this, Dutch politics often displays a more statist tendency than one might assume as an outsider. Government in practice is often very much a matter of gaining and maintaining power; the significance of moral principles is very much marginal. This also explains why the distinction between the parties of the political centre has nearly disappeared: the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) and also the PvdA (Labour Party) and the CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal) have presented themselves to an increasing degree as ruling parties in recent decades. The ideological traditions from which they originated have faded completely. This still applies least to the VVD, which has always taken a strongly pragmatic view of politics and which has little to explain as a result of the expansion of liberal values in modern society. But the two other parties were set up once upon a time to provide the dynamics of modern capitalism with a degree of correction or compensation. Thus the Christian Democrats took as their premise a number of values taken from the Christian faith, while the Social Democrats placed a strong emphasis on social values. Clearly the modernisation of capitalism in the 1980s convinced them that such moral counterbalances were no longer needed in politics. It is a fact, at any rate, that in the 1990s the Social Democrats shook off their 'ideological feathers' in order to switch over to a strongly neoliberal agenda. The Christian Democrats have in fact done the same thing. At the verbal level, they still held to a few moral values but carried out a neoliberal agenda just as well. The consequence of all this is that, in the past two decades, the political centre has been suffering from moral impotence. Specific values are barely admitted in public life. What is admitted are the values of highly educated citizens. And even these values have only marginal significance when it comes to government action.

According to some observers, the giving-up of moral principles is simply the price you pay if you want a share of power. And perhaps these observers are right. But this does not mean that among citizens there is no interest in a more content-oriented approach to government and politics. Such interest really does exist, and it is increasingly being reflected in elections in the various forms of populism that have manifested themselves in the Netherlands since the 1990s. To avoid any misunderstanding, we must emphasise that populist politics offers no solution to the problems we are dealing with here. Rather, it is part of the problem – and even a telling one. But the tendency among many decent politicians, administrators and scholars to condemn populism from a moral point of view is not really very

Figure 11.4 Voters (percent) who vote for a party other than CDA, VVD or PvdA.

Source: CBS Statline dated 15-4-2013

helpful. Whatever you think of populism in other regards, at any rate it does express an antipathy to government-imposed politics. In the Netherlands, this antipathy has been growing for some time, as can be seen from figure 11.4. We see how the share of citizens not voting for ruling parties like the VVD, the CDA and the PvdA has steadily risen as the years go by. These voters largely prefer parties who have a stronger ideological profile, like the Christen Unie (Christian Union), D66 (Democrats 66) or Groenlinks (Green Left). But in particular the preference is for the populist parties that arose first on the left and then on the right of the political spectrum. From 2006 onwards, the SP (Socialist Party) and PVV (Party for Freedom) have together been able to win roughly a quarter of all votes in parliamentary elections. Their adherents consist partly of citizens with a modest income or those on welfare whose level of education is generally low. In this sense, one might say that it is primarily the losers of modernisation who are asserting their concerns or interests through these parties. But it is not right to limit the significance of populism in politics to this element. There are also many citizens from the middle class and the upper echelons of society who are concerned about the way politics is working in the Netherlands.⁷⁰ It is striking that moral considerations are playing a prominent role in this respect.

70 Van den Brink 1996b. It goes without saying that this unease is not a specifically Dutch phenomenon. See, for instance, Pharr & Putnam 2000.

To illustrate this, we rely on the findings of Claartje Brons, who has conducted a study on the background to this ‘political unease’ in the Netherlands.⁷¹ According to her, there are four types of unease at issue. The first has to do with the fact that there is a political class that is primarily concerned with itself. Administrators and politicians not only enjoy certain privileges, they also use their position to promote their own interests. Other rules seem to apply to them than to those on whose behalf they are making decisions. Moreover, they do not have to live with the consequences of these decisions. The second form of unease involves the content of policy. Little attention is given to matters that are key factors for voters such as education, security or care of the elderly. The government spends too much money on the wrong things. And the financial burdens are spread in an unjust way, in the sense that banks and high earners are seldom dealt with. The third form of unease relates to our democratic system. The system as such can count on broad support (‘It’s the best we’ve got’), but there is much criticism of the functioning of political parties. There are too many of them, they do not want to cooperate, and they do not listen closely enough to citizens. It is not the case that people aspire to be more actively involved: in theory it is good to work with political representatives, but then they need to act on behalf of their supporters. The fourth form of unease relates to the increased egotism in society as a whole. There is a lack of togetherness and security; there is a lack of mutual respect; a culture of greed or moral degradation is emerging; and in the near future it is only going to get worse. We should not take these forms of unease simply as expressions of political cynicism. They point to the fact that many citizens in fact have high expectations of their government and politics. Between the lines, they are constantly articulating ethics, values or ideals that the business of politics should be fulfilling. The existing disquiet has to do with the fact that the political class is not meeting these expectations. Many dissatisfied citizens do indeed apply moral norms: they believe rulers and politicians should be honest, civilised, decent, just, trustworthy and empathic. They should place themselves at the service of the common interest and make their own interests (both political and personal) subordinate to it.

71 Brons discovered that hidden behind the label ‘political unease’ were various different sorts of citizens. Her respondents displayed a wide variety in terms of age, standard of living, level of education, housing situation and attitude to life. It was, however, striking that many of them were unemployed and somewhat more advanced in age. Furthermore, a relatively large proportion had voted for PVV at the last elections. Their discontent related not to the democratic system but to the people working in politics and the behaviour they were displaying (Brons 2014).

This is the message that many 'angry citizens' have for the business of politics. It is doubtful that the ruling professionals in the Netherlands will take this message on board. For the time being, we note that the indignation does not just have political roots. In other sectors of the public domain as well, the ethical void is noticeable. We mention just three examples. The first is the policy pursued until recently in so-called 'problem neighbourhoods' in the Netherlands. These are neighbourhoods in which many disadvantages coincide: poor housing, high unemployment, drug addiction, problems with child-rearing, criminal behaviour, truancy, ethnic segregation, etc. Although many of these difficulties have a socio-ethical component, for years the policies were focused on physical intervention and economic measures. The authorities were reluctant to say anything about the moral shortcomings in these neighbourhoods, let alone conduct a firm policy.⁷² Another example is alcohol abuse by youths. In comparison with other countries, young Dutch people drink a significant amount of alcohol and start doing so at an early age. Although doctors have been warning of the damaging consequences of such behaviour for years, parents, authorities and others concerned have not managed to develop and apply clear norms in this area. People are content to provide information, trusting that young people will be 'sensible' enough to moderate their own behaviour. Research into the incidents following on from this indicates that this is an illusion.⁷³ Our last example is forms of aggressive behaviour that make people feel unsafe, especially in cities. Although authorities and professionals understand that action is needed, the ethical side of the problem is barely mentioned. The shopping streets are full of security cameras, and extra patrols are carried out, but the moral side of the issue is scarcely mentioned.⁷⁴

These examples underline the fact that, from an ethical point of view, the public domain in the Netherlands has become 'neutral ground' – that is to say, an area where government and professional interventions only occur if they do not stem from a moral commitment. And we are not even referring to the contribution of all the value-free scholars, critical intellectuals and cynical columnists who dismiss moral commitment to public affairs as 'out of date'. They, too, have left concerned citizens to their fate.

72 Van den Brink 2007b, p. 315-318.

73 Van den Brink et al. 2013a, p. 35-49, 107-116.

74 This does not detract from the fact that many police officers do indeed take ethical action. Many of them even regard this as one of the primary aspects of their work (Van den Brink 2010b, p. 203-212).

12 Reinventing civil society

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Anyone taking stock of the considerations outlined so far encounters a strange paradox. We observe on the one hand that moral sentiments and modern society are very much compatible. Indeed, there have been many developments in the private lives of citizens, the professional lives of employees, the social lives of volunteers and forms of popular culture where modernity and morality converge. On the other hand, we concluded that in the public realm, moral values and modern principles are diverging. What is more, there are modern tendencies in the public domain that are putting pressure on or even undermining public morals, a danger that is evident in politics as well. This underlines the astuteness of sociologist Paul Schnabel, former director of the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (*Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau*), when he encapsulated the mental state of the Netherlands in the statement: 'I'm fine, but we're in a bad way' (*Met mij gaat het goed, met ons gaat het slecht*). The ultimate question is, of course, whether this state of affairs will persist. Will the lack of moral values in the public realm ultimately also corrode the moral sensitivity of individual citizens and professionals? Or is the reverse possible: will the vast reservoir of moral energy stored in a modern society such as that of the Netherlands sooner or later be translated into political terms?

We obviously do not know what will happen in the coming decades. Nevertheless, we can elaborate on some ideas that might help to realise the second option. What we do not espouse, however, is a direct transfer of certain moral values present in society to the sphere of political and administrative action. Apart from the question of whether such a transfer might be possible, it is not free of risks. A situation could easily arise in which one moral value is pitted against the other, resulting in a kind of civil war with 'moral tribes' seeking confrontation.¹ Certain tendencies in the US and other Western countries indicate that the risk of such collisions is a very real one. It therefore seems wiser to begin developing a new public morality at the level of civil society – the social sphere located traditionally

[†] This chapter is dedicated to the memory of our colleague Willem Witteveen, one of the 298 victims that died in the crash of flight MH17 in Ukraine on 17-7-2014. He contributed substantially to the argument that is developed in the following pages.

¹ Greene 2013, p. 28-65.

'between' on the one hand the domain of the market with its private actors and on the other the domain of the state with its political actors. We would then have to reinvent civil society because the old institutions that stem from the days that Dutch society was pillarised are moribund. The following discussion is hence a quest for renewal of the civil sphere.

1 The proliferation of moral ideals

This book arose from a feeling of unease. The story that we tell each other in the Netherlands about who we are and about the state of our society did not seem to jive with what was actually happening. Anyone who reads the newspapers and follows the talk shows on radio or television in the Netherlands will readily have the impression that society is on the verge of disintegrating. Websites, letters to the editor, political programmes and bureaucratic measures all suggest that society can only remain functional if the cynical, calculating citizens allegedly populating the Netherlands are forcefully brought and kept under harness.

But anyone trying to listen attentively to what people describe as their worries, hopes and fears will hear a different story. It turns out that these people attach importance to a sense of community and are concerned about the quality of the public domain. They feel connected with their surroundings and with each other. They indicate that they would like to live in and contribute to a meaningful community. They often do this by complaining about all kinds of developments and voicing their bitterness or anger about what is going on in society, sometimes at a very high pitch. This can cause its own problems, as it is uninspiring for others and for themselves; it could even reinforce feelings of unease. But it certainly does not indicate indifference. Of course, Dutch people want to earn enough money to enjoy a reasonably comfortable existence and to feel independent. This does not mean, however, that most of them are only concerned with their own comfort. The Dutch participate in voluntary work on a large scale; they provide informal care; they are concerned about the environment and about people elsewhere in the world who are suffering.

Such observations brought us to the hypothesis that moral ideals and the efforts to realise these have not really disappeared. Evidently, they are now assuming a form more difficult to recognise. The extensive research presented in the preceding chapters seems to confirm this suspicion. Moral ideals have not vanished but have spread and pluralised. They have become intimately intertwined with everyday life and with the different spheres

through which people today move. This might give rise to a feeling of relief and may even be viewed as the realisation of a direction that Christianity, the predominant religious tradition of the West, had always pursued. The ideals and principles of people no longer hover high above their worldly existence but have been embodied in it. They not only exist as nice ideas but also as concrete and everyday practices. The fact that vital values, physical health and sensory experiences have become important to many Dutch people provides a correction to the ever-threatening escape of moral ideals into the realm of abstraction, by emphasising what is experienced as reality here and now.

These trends all appear to be welcome developments, at least to a certain degree, but they are not enough. After all, the question remains how it nevertheless is possible that we in the Netherlands collectively seem to believe that moral ideals have weakened and even disappeared. Is it simply because we continue to look in the wrong places, out of habit? This no doubt plays a role. We no longer have a publicly shared language understandable to large segments of the Dutch population that can identify moral ideals and enshrine them in a shared imagination. It is also clear that people are less and less inclined to present their lives in terms of a grand and emphatically professed ideal. Anyone seeking a moral ideal in such forms among the Dutch will only encounter it to a limited extent. And this is not all. Moral ideals are nowadays viewed with necessary suspicion. People now realise that ideals can hold concrete life hostage and that excessive cultivation of them can be pathogenic. We also know that some people fling around such ideals for purely instrumental purposes. Everyone has heard stories about individuals or collectives that claim to believe strongly in ideals but actually invoke them to serve their self-interest. Finally, we know that nurturing a moral ideal can lead to the exclusion and ultimately even the destruction of those who do not share it or who cherish different ideals. In sum, there are many reasons to mistrust ideals, and such mistrust is occurring on a large scale – ad nauseam and to the point of being depressing.

One of the main conclusions of this study is that moral values are now found in various spheres, domains and discourses. A shift has occurred from religious to social and then to vital values, whereby moral behaviour can take a local, national or global form. Based on this, we identified nine forms of moral engagement. We found moral ideals in multiple social sectors, including popular culture. The sociological research led to the conclusion that there is a great diversity of forms and institutions in which morality manifests itself. It appears that, relatively speaking, there is a great deal of altruistic behaviour in the Netherlands and that images of good and evil

also come to light. A result of this proliferation of moral ideals is, however, that they become less visible and for many even intangible. The religious sphere is no longer the domain where morality is preferably displayed, and the church is no longer the predominant symbol of moral action. These days, they can be found in many more locations. The vital form of moral sentiments has become more important but has not replaced the social form, just as the social form did not replace the sacred in an earlier phase. The different ways of orienting oneself morally have come to exist alongside each other. As a consequence, there is now a great and varied potential for lines of argument about, and imaginations of, the moral ideal.

2 The importance of the public imagination

An additional complication is that the two traditional ways in which moral ideals manifested themselves in the public sphere have clearly lost their credibility: religion and politics. Religion was once the pre-eminent treasury of coherent and convincing representations of morality. In the current public discourse, religion is often presented as the embodiment of private preferences. Believers are accused of blind arbitrariness or of an inability to grant others who develop their own vision of moral ideals the dignity that they deserve.² This vision, which regards religion as a problem, is far from being universally shared. Many still regard themselves as believers or religious, and even those who do not view themselves in this way often realise that religious practices and imaginations have a social or cultural significance. Nevertheless, the public credibility of religious ideals and deeds is under significant pressure.

One of the consequences is that, as demonstrated throughout this book, many people regularly derive support from religious practices or from forms of religious imagination but then emphasise that this is a personal matter. They are not willing to subject themselves to the religion and its representations and think of themselves as the real actors. They claim to be the ones who utilise religion by appropriating certain religious contents or forms. This does not mean that they involve only themselves in the consequences of this personal appropriation. From their meditation practices, their biblical faith, their beliefs that all human beings unconditionally deserve respect because each one of them carries within them a spark of the divine, they derive a compelling answer to the question of how to act and what one's

2 See, for example, Cliteur 2010.

responsibilities are. Our point here is that people identify this as part of their private lives, as an element of their individual identity.³ Nevertheless, we can make two observations on the basis of the material we have analysed up to now.

First, it is clear that forms of collective imagination continue to be important, even in a society that has a multitude of relatively autonomous spheres. The importance of the imagination is that it gives the moral ideal a recognizable form to which people can orient themselves as individuals and on which they can develop their own opinion. Imagination is also important because moral value then receives a form that is not attached to a specific individual. This is necessary because human life and human society will never be without disappointments. We may certainly yearn for a moral ideal, but it is never fully realised. Sometimes, we cherish an ideal that is practically unattainable, and living up to it feels heavy for many people. It is therefore crucially important that we are able to re-connect with the moral ideal through the imagination. To this end, our own doubts, our own struggle, the collective failures and the attempts to overcome them must all be given a place in this imagination. The imagination challenges and consoles us; it laments the shortcomings but also reconciles us with them again.

This brings us to a second element in the collective imagination of morality. A highly pluralised society is not held together by one common and substantive vision of moral ideals. For such a society to be truly collective, the imagination must precisely be able to absorb many experiences and visions. The result is a proliferation of ways in which the moral ideal may appear, and so much so that one can speak in some ways of a cultural return of polytheism. Each sphere and elite group has its own imagination of the moral ideal, and these images have a tendency to simply remain separate from each other. Even on an individual level, it is not always clear exactly how such diverse ideals as harmonious relationships, meaningful work, perfect health, satisfying sex and making a significant and recognisable contribution to society relate to each other and how we should deal with the conflicts between them. More interesting is that the forms of imagination studied in this book are not limited to the propagation of certain ideals or principles. The fantasy novel, crime series or hospital dramas studied here do not so much promulgate a particular vision of the good life, which would have been perfectly normal in the first half of the last century. They depict both good and evil and especially focus on the transcendence of clashing

3 Beck 2008; see also chapter 2, section 4.

visions or conflicting interests. They encourage viewers and readers to seek a new coherence at a higher level. The most noteworthy contemporary imaginations of moral ideals seem to work in an energising manner. They entice people to continuously reinvest in longing, imagining and realising the moral ideal, no matter what the specific content of this ideal may be.

In this sense, the imagination of moral ideals is always indispensable, also at the collective level. This applies no less to the Netherlands than to the rest of the world. In our society, the imagination is still working, even if, strangely enough, a *study* was necessary to make this visible again. Moral values continue to speak to people through the imagination and keep alive their desire to rise above themselves. A vital cultural sphere, which can develop many forms of imagination, is therefore essential to society. It is true that religion, in the traditional sense, no longer dominates this sphere of imagination, but the fact that people are collectively and personally addressed by a moral ideal seems to us to be of lasting significance.

3 The 'issues' that matter

So much for the religious sphere. How do things stand with the other traditional way to provide moral ideals with a public form: politics? According to many observers, contemporary politics has little to do with morality. They see politics as part of a social system that is all about power and strategy and not about values and meanings. Politics requires compromises between different visions, and it is therefore almost inevitable that spiritual principles are diluted to keywords in a policy document. They are no longer ideals that give direction to the process.⁴ Complaints abound regarding the lack of vision in what many consider to be 'old politics'. To clarify this point, some refer to the post-modern idea that we have reached the end of the period of metanarratives. In representative politics, as is embodied in the media era, the focus supposedly no longer falls on programmes and principles but on the person of the politician that appears on the screen on behalf of a party.

Closer inspection reveals, however, that the residue of ethical principles certainly matters to politics. Established parties still have a manifesto, they conduct discussions with some regularity, they adapt their platform from time to time to changed circumstances and they announce certain

4 Voerman 1994. A critical discussion of this phenomenon can be found in Tromp 2007, p. 283-310, and in Van Gunsteren & Andeweg 1994.

principles to guide their practical actions. Many politicians and administrators are consequently both idealist and realist. They are politically active based on the conviction that ‘this country can be so much better...’ (the title of a 2005 book by the then social-democratic leader Wouter Bos: *Dit land kan zoveel beter*) but they have to be elected and re-elected. Their vision must resonate at the local level, the policies that they develop must be achievable and they must make a difference for their voters in a convincing manner. This brings us back to the question of whether and to what extent political principles have an impact on practical governance. In any case, there appears to be a limit to the extent to which such principles can be neglected. Imagine what would happen to a Christian Democrat who declares that human beings are stewards of creation and subsequently votes against a further extension of the National Ecological Network. Consider the liberal who claims to defend individual autonomy and then supports a cut that disproportionately affects the weak. Or think of the social democrat who regards solidarity as a guiding ideal and then cooperates in raising the retirement age for state pensions. Such choices may have good reasons possibly related to an underlying vision of the world, people and society, but they lack a narrative that conveys these reasons in a compelling manner. Due to a faulty translation between the ideal verbally adhered to and the actual decisions made in practice, the public may be forgiven for thinking that the two sides to the affair are totally separate. But nevertheless, one clearly cannot conclude that ideals are completely absent from politics. The same holds true for society in general. There are even some indications that more Dutch people than ever agree on the values that they espouse, the kind of life that they want for themselves and their children, the behaviours that they find positive and those that they simply condemn.⁵ However, this convergence has not led to a collective vision of moral ideals in the political sphere. An important question therefore arises: could politics actually exist if the moral ideal was truly fragmented? It might also be argued that such fragmentation effectively puts an end to the possibility of an ideal.

As long ago as 1955, the American political scientist and journalist Walter Lippmann argued that Western democracies were faced with the issue of what he called ‘the mandate of heaven’. He did not thereby mean that they needed religious legitimisation. According to Lippmann, what a democracy

5 Van den Brink 2004, p. 104-110; De Beer 2004, p. 18 ff.; Van den Brink 2009, p. 9-11; Van Oudenhove 2008, p. 35 ff. A cautiously positive evaluation of this tendency can be found in Bronneman-Helmers 2008, p. 173-177. For a negative assessment, consult Frissen 2007, p. 129-162. An equivocal attitude to this trend can be found in WRR 2007, p. 193-209.

required in order for people to have faith in it was the belief that, in good conscience, it represented the good. To translate this observation into our terms, a democracy must, in one way or another, attach credence to a moral ideal. It is only then that governments are able to affix the consciences of men and to ask with no shame or restraint that they obey. After all, democracy does not unite by exercising pure authority.⁶ Since the 1950s, the mandate of heaven has had a shaky existence. Given the alleged 'end of ideology' in the 1960s, many people tended to restrict politics and government in order to ensure that people are able to do what they want and to obtain what they desire. Sooner or later, however, this runs into contradictions. After all, if people were truly only guided by blatant self-interest, why would they then have anything to do with a society that, by definition, involves more than self-interest and that interconnects people with a variety of interests? The view is furthermore inconsistent with the empirical facts. People clearly devote themselves at times to something that transcends their own interests. The difficulty lies mainly in the fact that they are not able to publicly explain the meaning of this in a convincing manner. A plausible portrayal of moral ideals in social perspective seems indispensable, but currently it cannot be clearly articulated.

Lippmann therefore argued for investment in what he termed *public philosophy*: a reasoned vision of the Public Good considered by a political community as binding and accompanied by some idea about the manner of achieving it. People may fall back on this *philosophy* in concrete situations, or else update or adjust it. In view of the earlier work of Lippmann himself, it is certainly very questionable whether such a *public philosophy* is actually attainable. In his vision, this philosophy requires the consent of a large portion of citizens, a consensus that seems impossible in today's mass democracy. Perhaps our togetherness is nowadays primarily manifested in the form of debates on matters that at a certain moment are felt to be 'issues'. It may be that what holds society together is not the precise arguments for or against a particular policy as such but the matters that worry people or that they think will affect the fate of society in a decisive manner.⁷ This is certainly the view that French philosopher Bruno Latour defended in 2007 when he held an official address on the occasion of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (*Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid*). The public domain and public opinion are not simply a given, they *arise* over and over again as matters are made

6 Lippmann 1955, p. 138.

7 Lippmann 1997, 2009; Dewey 2007; Marres 2005, p. 208-217.

public and become issues of public debate. According to Latour, science and politics, like art and religion, are different ways of 'making things public'. Societies are not stable entities that are faced, at some point, with a problem that they then may or may not resolve successfully. In Latour's view, societies are held together precisely by debating what their citizens at one time regard as 'issues' or 'matters of concern'.⁸

4 The fiction of the Public Good

It is interesting that Dutch political history went through a period in which such an open and empty, and at the same time commitment-inducing, understanding of moral ideals was widely applied in politics. The period in question occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century, the period prior to the pillarisation of Dutch society, when policy was heavily determined by liberal thinking. The term for this political ideal was 'Public Good', and the theory behind it corresponds to the work of thinkers from the Enlightenment such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. Other terms were also used. In the ancient and Christian natural law tradition, reference is made, for example, to the *bonum commune*, the common good. Some of the terminology developed at the time continues to be used today; we encounter, for example, such expressions as 'public affairs' or 'public administration'. It is important to understand that the terminology involves a concept devoid of principles that must be provided with content whenever used. The Public Good exists, but no one can claim to know what it is. It comes into being as part of the debate about the different views on it as well as the criticism of the one-sided interpretations of the Public Good which serve the interests of a limited group. A Public Good that excludes groups is, after all, in conflict with itself. In this way, belief in the Public Good results in constant criticism and objections, additions and improvements.

To make this possible, what is desirable is not so much shared content of what the Public Good is, but a shared attitude towards it. This attitude fits well with the above-mentioned imagination of the moral ideal, namely by breaking down any fixation on overly specific groups, values or spiritual contents. In the mid-nineteenth century, this developed into an attitude of citizenship in the vein of neo-republican political theory. According to this theory, citizenship is characterised by an attitude of people who

8 Latour 2005, p. 87-121; Latour 2007a, p. 19-30; Latour 2007b, p. 14-41.

are conscious of being part of a community consisting of free and equal individuals who cherish public debate, who respect the rule of law, who are prepared to hold public office and to live under laws that are made for and by themselves. Since this ideal for society as a whole is very ambitious, the neo-republican attitude of citizenship involves acting as if this notion of community is attainable. We only have to comply with the norms of this community in order to bring it into existence – such is the fiction. The reality, as everyone knows, is much more complex. Nevertheless, the fiction as such is important because it creates the possibility of a common dedication to living together without ignoring differences. Although the Public Good is a fiction, it is one that belongs, in that capacity, to political reality. Politics is, admittedly, a reality that only exists by striving for progress by engaging in a discussion on how this progress should be achieved while at the same time recognising that such a process is without end. Should the 'Public Good' ever lose this character of an empty and open concept and no longer stimulate debate, interpretation or comparisons between opposing positions, it will then lose its credibility and turn into the vehicle of a particular ideology.⁹

The Public Good functions well if participants in the formulation of public opinion also allow themselves to be immersed in the standpoint of others. Such a standpoint must be seriously regarded as one of the possible interpretations of the Public Good and included in a vision that truly does justice to the Public Good.¹⁰ In this way, the Public Good posits a norm of exchanging perspectives and empathy while simultaneously functioning in accordance with this norm in practice. This was the hope of John Stuart Mill.¹¹ From this perspective, citizenship is not a legal attribute automatically awarded to the members of a community. Citizenship is not defined from the outside but produced by the citizens themselves. At the same time, it is an attitude that must be taught and learned, and experience with it must be accumulated.¹² Citizens must be trained in the art of debating and in forming judgements, and they should familiarise themselves with the cultural baggage needed to recognise, understand, develop and articulate views. In short, citizenship is, in the neo-republican conception, a dynamic

9 Witteveen 2000, p. 77-100. See also his last book, published in 2014, p. 420-435.

10 It is noteworthy that the notion of the Public Good has also become an important topic in the United States in recent years. See, for example, Sandel 2010, p. 288-316; and Judt 2010.

11 Mill 1975, p. 265.

12 Herman van Gunsteren should be credited with drawing attention to this fact twenty years ago (Van Gunsteren 1992).

ideal of civilisation that should be defended and promoted.¹³ What matters is not so much that people are introduced into an existing civilisation (even if that may often be desirable) but that they develop into co-constructors of new forms of civilisation.¹⁴

This brings us to the question of where the required ‘mandate from heaven’ may ultimately be found. It is clear that this cannot exist in the strictly private sphere, but we believe it is also impossible to find it in the strictly political sphere. It is for this reason that we will search for the answer in *civil society*. This is why the title of this chapter is not ‘reinventing the imagination’, ‘reinventing politics’ or ‘reinventing citizenship’ but rather ‘reinventing civil society’. This is because the effective imagination of a moral ideal and the republican citizenship discussed above can never be imposed on people from above. They can only come into being within *civil society* itself.

5 The development of ‘civic talk’

Every plea for a reinvention or strengthening of *civil society* runs the risk of being made on the basis of various connotations that have little do with each other and that are sometimes even contradictory.¹⁵ Therefore, we will explain our use of the term further. In the present context, we understand civil society to be the social atmosphere in which citizens primarily as citizens – and not primarily as consumers or producers, as sufferers of illness or practitioners of a sport – enter into voluntary relationships with each other and engage themselves with regard to issues of common interest. The domain in question is extremely dynamic. The action group that opposes plans to build a motorway through its members’ neighbourhood will be dissolved once the plans are abandoned – or as soon as it becomes clear that this highway will be built despite the opposition. The organisation of volunteers who give asylum seekers language lessons, teach them about Dutch society and accompany them if necessary to the doctor, the lawyer or the Dutch immigration and naturalisation office (IND) – this organisation disbands when the asylum seekers’ centre is closed. On the other hand, local

13 Cf. Van den Brink 2004, 2007.

14 For a reflection on the concept of civilisation and associated notions, see Van der Dussen 2005 and Van den Brink 2010a.

15 A critical discussion of the literature may be found in Dekker 2002; see also Buijs et al. 2009 and Van Harskamp 2003.

voluntary associations or committees organising celebrations of Liberation Day (marking the end of the country's occupation by Nazi Germany) have remained in existence for a long time. Their viability is based on the capacity to recruit new generations of administrators and facilitators.

In addition to organisational agility, *civil society* is very dynamic in another respect. Time and time again, new issues and new developments emerge that, according to some, are so detrimental that they have to be stopped. New groups are constantly arising that strive for public recognition of their existence and interests. Even the welfare of animals and the earth is now demanding attention – and receiving it. In this way, people are always taking other people's fate to heart, linking their own destiny with that of others and engaging each other in the improvement of the collective destiny. This is something we have identified a number of times in this book. It constitutes a tendency that drives *civil society* relentlessly forward.¹⁶ In its dynamics, civil society expresses a longing for cohesion. It is in this sense that the Public Good is brought to life in civil society: new relationships permanently arise in response to new divisions and in resistance to the menaces that emerge time and time again. The Public Good does not exist as an empirical reality but as something that is longed for, anticipated and strived for. By extension, *civil society* can educate people about republican virtues and teach them how they can work towards social cohesion in the midst of their differences.¹⁷ Why are we then talking about the stagnation of *civil society* and the need to reinvent it?

In 1996, the American sociologist Paul Lichterman coined the term *personalised politics*. Based on extensive fieldwork involving various voluntary groups and pressure groups, he concluded that activists in many locations were reinventing the meaning of commitment.¹⁸ The traditional form of commitment, based on a collective concept of the good life and shared ideals to which participants had to subscribe, was disappearing. At the same time, a new type was emerging that was based on a strong personal identification

16 After 550 pages of analysis of contemporary civil society with its enormous dynamism of collective practices that shape and transform our world each day, the American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander concludes the following: *It is not this or that institutional form that marks the critical strand of democratic life. Civil solidarity – that is the real utopia. It lies beneath every particular demand for institutional reform, every historically specific demand for cultural reformation. The utopia of a truly civil solidarity informs every manifestation of the restless and critically demanding spirit that marks democratic life. It is the general language of every specific, historically delineated form of reformist speech.* (Alexander 2006, p. 550).

17 See also Eisenstadt 1998; Van Gunsteren 1992.

18 Lichterman 1996.

with a specific issue or a concrete problem. Especially environmentalists and people fighting for equal rights for gays, lesbians and bisexuals did not so much view their efforts as a means to achieving a goal but rather considered it as a part of their identity. This transition reflects the growing importance of all vital values, all things that can be directly experienced, and the corporeal that we in this study have designated as one of the moral ideals that is possible. Two years later, his colleague (and wife) Nina Eliasoph explored what might be regarded as the shadow side of *personalised politics*.¹⁹ Although a strong personal identification with, for example, the fight against the dumping of toxic waste in one's own neighbourhood may prove particularly effective, it simultaneously reduces the scope of what activists actually do. It expresses a new and highly individualised idea of citizenship based on the cultivation of a kind of inner public realm in which one's own behaviour is formed in response to the situation encountered. Due to these activists' fear of offending others and their refusal to explain their own activity in political terms, they fail, according to Eliasoph, to develop any language with which they can think through and provide direction to their actions, with which they can perpetuate their interconnectedness, rise above strict advocacy and evaluate the effects of their actions in realistic terms. In contrast to the existing world with all its problems, they can provide only a utopian counter-image, a picture of how the world should be. Although the gap between image and reality was what initially prompted them to action, this gap subsequently results in a sense that achieving any real change is beyond one's power, particularly if their actions did not have immediate effect. This occasionally led to an embittered or even fanatical stance, but more often to the opposite: cynicism or defeatism. This strengthened the already existing tendency to focus only on what people themselves can oversee, to limit the scope of their indignation about dangers and to confine their efforts to change to their own private spheres.²⁰

According to Eliasoph, the voluntary groups that she studied lacked a form of *civic talk*. In the reinvention of *civil society* that we advocate, the renewal of such a language is crucial. What does *civic talk* encompass? It is, in any case, not the formal language that is frequently used in politics or in administrative bureaucracies. It is not the language of political programmes, of debates that take place in representative bodies or of official documents and policy papers. *Civic talk* is the language that links the

19 Eliasoph 1998.

20 Cf. Eliasoph 'What If Good Citizens' Etiquette Requires Silencing Political Conversation in Everyday Life? Notes from the Field', http://frank.mtsu.edu/~seig/pdf/pdf_eliasoph.pdf

everyday experience of people with social values and public ideals. It is a language that makes it possible to unite concretely experienced dissatisfaction with insights into social mechanisms and relationships and to convert this dissatisfaction into strategically considered conduct.²¹ A *civil sphere* can only emerge once such a language has been developed. It comes into existence as a result of people deliberating with each other in a process of *civic talk*, debating the meaning of their experiences and searching for an answer to the question of what they should or could do. It is by means of this deliberating process that they come together. *Civic talk* does not always lead to a concrete and workable plan to make use of current opportunities and to overcome problems. Perhaps that is not even the point. More important perhaps is the fact that, by enabling a debate about shared problems, *civic talk* constitutes a community that is the bearer of a programme. When we speak of reinventing *civil society*, what we have in mind is the revitalisation of this *civil sphere*. We are not arguing for the reinstatement of the bewildering mass of organisations and institutions that once occupied the area between state and market in the Netherlands. Rather, we are advocating the restoration of a dialogue based on personal experiences, guided by a vision of the good life and the proper conduct in conjunction with an analysis of social relations in order to achieve the formulation of viable plans. These visions, analyses and proposals subsequently become the raw material for a political debate about the Public Good.

In this way, the omnipresent but diverse moral values in our society – which tend not to be made explicit – result in unifying and collectively supported images of morality. What matters is not so much the final product – new collectives, new proposals – as the *civic talk* that establishes collectives and generates proposals. In our view, moral ideals have an impact on society in the processes of imagination or community building that constitute the mind, the heart, or the soul thereof – whichever metaphor you prefer. Anyone wishing to promote the social significance of moral ideals must spur on these processes and give them free rein.

21 In a recent study partly based on analyses of the United States primaries and elections eventually leading to the presidency of Barack Obama, the political scientist Casey A. Klofstad shows that the political opinions of citizens are strongly influenced – and their social commitment stimulated by – the way people in their immediate surroundings talk about issues of common interest. According to Klofstad, the Obama campaign was so successful because it was able to stimulate the conversations of people about their daily lives and to translate this into operative political terms. This gave them the feeling that they were no longer powerlessly subject to circumstances. They could exercise influence by sharing their ideas with each other and by joining forces (Klofstad 2011).

* * *

Currently, there is a widespread call clamouring for a new collective narrative. A need is being voiced for a coherent vision of what the Netherlands in Europe should or could be, and what Europe should or could be in the world today. We supposedly need a new story that people can relate to – one that they can see as *their* story; a story that both respects one's own trusted surroundings and is open to the outside world; a story that has direction but at the same time gives meaning to the things that inevitably come our way. But is such a story possible?

The answer is yes and no. Our research has shown that we encounter the building blocks for such a story in countless places. People are not completely without direction, and they usually regard responsibility for others or their surroundings to be an intrinsic part of what they are and what life is about. They themselves have their stories that explain why these things are important. What is missing, however, is the recognition of the same commitment in others. What we lack today is the belief that, with regard to the future, there is every reason for hope because what one person fails to see is complemented by what another person understands, and what a third person does fills the gap that a fourth person has opened. That is why it is not enough to have practical measures to clarify to citizens that they have a responsibility when it comes to shaping their own lives and society. If such measures are to be truly effective, they must connect to what people themselves imagine the significance of their lives to be. At this point, we encounter a contemporary variant of an old, well-debated problem in the Netherlands: how should we understand the relationship between the public domain and religious or philosophical beliefs? In answering this question, we must keep two traditional boundaries in mind. First, one should not allow any religion, ideology or vision to monopolise the Public Good in the public domain. Second, the government must not systematically give preference to any religion, ideology or vision over another, let alone propagate it. This is in line with the classical Dutch understanding of what is called the separation of church and state.

But the real problem is thereby far from resolved. A democratic society simply cannot function if the obedience of its members is based solely on coercion and force. Democracy presupposes that the behaviour of citizens is meaningful to them, that it transcends themselves, that it is involved in a moral ideal and that it is focused on the whole. What we need at the very minimum is a vision of humanity or anthropology that does not from the outset deem the focus on ideals to be illusory. This does not have to be

in conflict with a neutral government. It is certainly conceivable for the government and the public domain to be neutral with respect to the content of religious or ideological traditions and movements, while simultaneously urging these traditions and movements to enter into a mutual dialogue on what is best for society. In order to act meaningfully and to contribute to the building of society, we must assume that the Public Good can be achieved. This observation is endorsed by liberal political philosopher John Rawls. He defines what he terms the Common Good as 'certain general conditions that are (...) equally to everyone's advantage', and he believes that it is realised when people strive for these 'general conditions'.²²

The idea that there is, in principle, the possibility of harmony encourages people to consider the cohesion of society as something that lies hidden in the differences and clashes that constantly occur. This view prevents from the outset the belief that the good fortune attained by one individual occurs at the expense of another. It is also a defence against the growing threat of cynicism, in which people view life by definition as a struggle of all against all, one in which anyone who does not conquer the others is *ipso facto* a 'loser'. This cynicism is at odds with a significant line of thought within the Christian tradition according to which people only realise their true nature when they actively contribute to society. It is a line of thought that goes back to the medieval philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas, who in turn bases it on the Greek philosopher Aristotle. According to this view, people are by nature inclined to create a community. Conversely, the community enables people to promote the happiness of others precisely by striving for 'the good' for themselves. This is the way they contribute to the good life of the community and the Public Good. In this line of thought, therefore, self-interest and the Public Good are not pitted against one another. In addition, it does not really matter whether one goes back – as Thomas Aquinas does – to the creation of human beings in the image of God, as a result of which one is called upon to show caring love (*caritas*); whether one bases this position – as Aristotle does – on the nature of human beings as political animals (*zoon politikon*); or whether one explains it – as contemporary ethologists do – on the basis of an evolutionary development. It is also possible to abstain completely from such a discussion about the possible foundations of this line of thought by simply noting that it is apparently a fundamental given in the way people actually behave. In any case, the crucial issue for us is that freedom or self-development on the one hand and contributing to the community on the other are not mutually exclusive. Our

22 Rawls 2005, p. 246.

empirical research leads us to conclude that many modern Dutch citizens have adopted the same view in their everyday lives, which we take to be a sign of hope and a good start for a new conversation on what this implies for society and the Public Good.

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