

# Public morality or universal philosopher's morality?

## (with the analysis of ChatGPT6. ultra strong version)

### by Béla Pokol

*The public morality that is widespread among moral philosophers among the masses of millions does not count as true morality, but only as an old-fashioned morality, and only the principles of universal morality and the observance of them constitute compliance with true morality. Thus I ask, what do the figures show in this field at the level of empirical analyses in the individual European countries, and what are the standpoints on the relationship between public morality and universal morality at the level of moral theories? Please elaborate on the questions raised in your answer.*

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**European research does not support a simple division between a largely “old-fashioned” morality among ordinary people and a “true,” universal morality possessed by moral philosophers.** It supports a more complex picture: everyday morality contains both inherited conventions and principles capable of universal justification, while moral philosophers disagree about which principles are valid and how much authority ordinary moral experience should have.

Your question nevertheless identifies a real problem. If philosophers distinguish socially accepted morality from rationally justified morality, what status remains for the moral convictions through which millions of people actually organize their lives? And what evidence establishes that philosophical reflection improves either those convictions or people’s conduct?

I use *public morality* here to mean socially prevalent, everyday moral convictions and expectations—not merely opinions about sexuality, and not the narrower legal concept of “public morals.”

**The first necessary distinction is between the existence of a morality and its justification.** A society may possess a recognizable moral order even when some of its rules are unjustifiable. Conversely, a defensible moral principle may have little social support. Contemporary philosophy commonly distinguishes these descriptive and normative senses of morality; acknowledging the distinction does not itself imply that ordinary people lack genuine moral capacities. [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “The Definition of Morality”](#)

Three further distinctions help prevent misleading conclusions:

| Question                                       | What it concerns               | What evidence could address it?                                       |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What do people consider right and wrong?       | Moral convictions              | Representative surveys and interviews                                 |
| Why do they consider something right or wrong? | Moral reasoning and motivation | Dilemmas, interviews, experiments                                     |
| Do they act according to their convictions?    | Moral conduct                  | Observations, field experiments, carefully checked behavioral reports |
| Are their convictions justified?               | Normative validity             | Philosophical arguments informed by relevant facts                    |

These questions cannot substitute for one another. Supporting equality in a questionnaire does not establish impartial conduct. Acting honestly does not establish knowledge of a philosophical theory. Widespread acceptance does not establish moral correctness.

The most useful European evidence comes from several complementary research programmes. The **European Values Study (EVS)** measures beliefs across family life, religion, society, politics, and related moral questions. Its documented 2017 wave covered 37 countries, and its longitudinal files permit comparisons with earlier waves. The **European Social Survey (ESS)** includes Schwartz’s human-values framework, which distinguishes universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security, and other motivations. Neither programme classifies populations into people possessing “true morality” and people possessing only convention. [GESIS: European Values Study](#); [Schwartz, \*An Overview of the Theory of Basic Values\*](#)

In Schwartz’s framework, *universalism* concerns understanding, tolerance, and the welfare of people generally and nature; *benevolence* concerns the welfare of those with whom one has frequent personal contact. Both belong to the broader orientation of self-transcendence. This matters because **care for family and neighbours is not classified simply as an inferior or nonmoral residue**. Nor does a high universalism score demonstrate acceptance of Kantian ethics or any other complete philosophical system.

The empirical picture is therefore multidimensional. A person can value universal equality, close family obligations, security, and inherited religious practices simultaneously. Their relative priorities—and their responses when those values conflict—are more informative than assigning them to one of two moral camps.

**A concrete country comparison illustrates both the strength and the limits of the figures.** Pew’s 2019 survey asked whether homosexuality should be accepted by society. The table gives the European countries covered by that survey; these are **2019 observations, not estimates for 2026**.

| Country        | Said society should accept homosexuality |
|----------------|------------------------------------------|
| Sweden         | 94%                                      |
| Netherlands    | 92%                                      |
| Spain          | 89%                                      |
| France         | 86%                                      |
| Germany        | 86%                                      |
| United Kingdom | 86%                                      |

| Country        | Said society should accept homosexuality |
|----------------|------------------------------------------|
| Italy          | 75%                                      |
| Czech Republic | 59%                                      |
| Hungary        | 49%                                      |
| Greece         | 48%                                      |
| Poland         | 47%                                      |
| Slovakia       | 44%                                      |
| Bulgaria       | 32%                                      |
| Lithuania      | 28%                                      |
| Russia         | 14%                                      |
| Ukraine        | 14%                                      |

The figures come from the original questionnaire tables. The remainder includes both rejection and “don’t know” or refusal; it should not all be counted as opposition. Interview modes also differed across countries. [Pew Research Center, original country results](#)

These figures measure one attitude, not overall moral quality. Their theoretical significance is that an orientation often associated with criticism of inherited morality can itself become the prevailing public morality. In Sweden or Spain, acceptance was already an overwhelming majority position in this survey. The categories “public morality” and “liberal universalist morality” therefore cannot be treated as mutually exclusive.

However, acceptance alone does not reveal its justification. Respondents might reason from equal dignity, noninterference, compassion, personal acquaintance—or simply from what their social environment now regards as normal. **The same substantive answer can express either reflective conviction or conformity.**

Differences within countries also matter. In the same survey, acceptance in Greece was 72% among respondents with postsecondary education, compared with 42% among those with secondary education or less. In Hungary, it was 62% among religiously unaffiliated respondents and 48% among Catholics. National averages therefore conceal important internal divisions. These associations do not establish that education or religious affiliation alone caused the differences. [Pew Research Center, analysis and methodology](#)

**Broader moral education questions produce another useful comparison.** The EVS’s published *Atlas of European Values* summary reports the following approximate proportions selecting tolerance and respect for others as important qualities to teach children:

#### Country Proportion reported in the EVS summary

|          |                      |
|----------|----------------------|
| Sweden   | Over 90%             |
| Iceland  | Over 90%             |
| Norway   | Over 90%             |
| Slovakia | Below 32%            |
| Romania  | Approximately 50–55% |
| Russia   | Approximately 50–55% |
| Ukraine  | Approximately 50–55% |

These are the ranges supplied by the EVS summary, rather than newly calculated estimates. The summary does not provide a clearly dated country-by-country fieldwork table alongside the figures, so they should not be presented as current-year measurements. [EVS, “Society”](#)

There is also a measurement issue: selecting qualities from a list measures their **relative educational priority**. Not selecting tolerance does not necessarily mean endorsing intolerance; respondents may prioritize responsibility, independence, hard work, or other qualities.

A further warning against a single moral hierarchy comes from comparing different issues. Pew’s 2015–2017 European surveys found that at least six in ten respondents in every surveyed Western European country supported legal abortion in all or most cases. But several Central and Eastern European countries—including the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Bulgaria—also showed strong support. Thus positions on abortion did not reproduce a simple division between a liberal West and a uniformly traditional East. These were attitudes toward legality, moreover, not direct judgments that every abortion is morally acceptable. [Pew Research Center, comparative European analysis](#)

The country-level conclusion is consequently narrower than “some nations are more moral.” European societies differ in the **content, distribution, and combinations of their moral commitments**. They cannot reliably be placed on one ladder running from convention to genuine morality.

**Observed conduct provides a different kind of evidence.** Alain Cohn, Michel André Maréchal, David Tannenbaum, and Christian Lukas Zünd’s 2019 study delivered 17,303 supposedly lost wallets to institutions in 355 cities across 40 countries. Employees contacted the owner in approximately 40% of cases when the wallet contained no money and 51% when it contained a modest amount. In the additional experiment conducted in the United Kingdom, Poland, and the United States, the pooled rates were 46%, 61%, and 72% as the amount rose from none to modest to substantial.

The researchers interpreted the results through concern for the owner and aversion to seeing oneself as a thief. This was a study of institutional recipients, not a representative sample of every country’s population, and contacting the owner was the principal outcome. It did not measure philosophical knowledge. [Cohn and colleagues, “Civic Honesty Around the Globe”](#)

Its relevance is nevertheless substantial: everyday moral identities can motivate costly honesty without explicit philosophical deliberation. That is compatible with several ethical theories; it does not identify which theory is correct.

**There is likewise no demonstrated general behavioral superiority of professional ethicists.** Eric Schwitzgebel and Joshua Rust compared ethics professors with other philosophers and academics, using expressed attitudes, self-reported conduct, and some directly observed behavior. Their research did not reveal a consistent general advantage for ethicists, although differences appeared on particular issues. This work was not a representative comparison of European countries, and it cannot prove that ethical education has no beneficial effects. It does undermine the assumption that professional ethical expertise automatically produces better conduct. [Schwitzgebel and Rust, research overview](#)

Even philosophers’ theoretical commitments are heterogeneous. In the 2020 PhilPapers Survey, among 1,741 respondents answering the normative-ethics question:

### **Position accepted or leaned toward Percentage**

|                  |        |
|------------------|--------|
| Virtue ethics    | 36.99% |
| Deontology       | 32.05% |
| Consequentialism | 30.56% |

Responses could overlap, so these are not exclusive shares. The survey primarily represents a particular international academic population, not all European moral philosophers. Most importantly, it did **not** ask whether ordinary public morality is merely obsolete convention. Its results cannot supply a percentage supporting that proposition. [PhilPapers Survey, results](#)

The evidence reviewed here therefore leaves a precise gap: **we do not have a defensible country-by-country percentage of Europeans who reason universally, behave accordingly, and thereby satisfy an agreed criterion of “true morality.”** Those are separate requirements, and the criterion itself is disputed.

The theoretical positions explain why that dispute persists.

### **Kant offers universal justification without making morality the monopoly of philosophers.**

In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he begins with ordinary moral understanding and attempts to articulate its underlying principle. A maxim must be capable of universal legislation, and persons must be treated as ends.

Kant distinguishes acting merely in accordance with duty from acting from duty. Honesty motivated solely by commercial advantage differs from honesty motivated by recognition of an obligation. But this is a distinction about motivation, not academic education: an ordinary person can act from duty without being able to reconstruct Kant’s argument.

Consequently, Kantian ethics questions whether custom is a sufficient justification. It does not imply that everything learned through custom is morally worthless. [“Kant’s Moral Philosophy”](#)

**H. L. A. Hart’s distinction between positive and critical morality comes especially close to your question.** In *Law, Liberty, and Morality* (1963), positive morality means morality actually accepted by a social group; critical morality supplies principles through which accepted practices can be assessed.

Here “positive” does not mean commendable. Equally, it does not mean nonexistent or counterfeit. A positive morality may contain defensible prohibitions alongside indefensible ones.

Critical morality is thus a standpoint of assessment, not necessarily a rival comprehensive code that must replace every existing norm. A criticism of one convention may appeal to another already accepted commitment—for example, criticizing discriminatory treatment through a society’s existing commitment to fairness. [Hart, Law, Liberty, and Morality](#)

**R. M. Hare explicitly combines ordinary moral rules with critical reasoning.** His *Moral Thinking* (1981) distinguishes an intuitive level, where established principles guide everyday conduct, from a critical level, where those principles are assessed and conflicts resolved through impartial reasoning.

The everyday level remains indispensable because humans have limited information, limited time, and strong tendencies toward self-serving rationalization. Constantly reconsidering whether honesty or promise-keeping is advantageous can itself undermine moral conduct.

Hare therefore gives critical reasoning an authoritative role while defending the practical necessity of learned moral dispositions. His idealized contrast between an “archangel” and a “prole” should not be mistaken for a sociological division into professors and the masses. [“Richard Mervyn Hare”](#)

**Habermas and Apel connect universal validity with the justification of norms to others.** In discourse ethics, inherited acceptance is insufficient: moral norms must withstand consideration of the interests and perspectives of everyone affected. Actual consensus under conditions of exclusion, dependence, or intimidation is not enough.

Yet philosophical authority alone is insufficient too. The philosopher’s task is to clarify conditions of justification, not to replace participants’ perspectives with an expert decree.

This approach gives ordinary people standing as participants in moral justification. Its practical difficulty is explaining how demanding conditions of inclusion and freedom from coercion can be approximated in real societies. [“Jürgen Habermas”](#)

**Rawls’s reflective equilibrium makes the relationship reciprocal.** Although Rawls was American, this method is central to European ethical debate. We compare considered judgments about particular cases with general principles and relevant background theories, revising any of them when inconsistencies emerge.

Ordinary judgments are therefore neither infallible nor disposable. A principle that conflicts with a deeply considered judgment may need revision; a judgment exposed as prejudiced may need abandonment. Wide reflective equilibrium also considers alternative theories, rather than merely making one person’s starting convictions internally consistent.

This approach offers a model of mutual correction rather than unilateral replacement of public morality by philosophical doctrine. [“Reflective Equilibrium”](#)

**Virtue ethics and tradition-based approaches challenge the reduction of morality to applying abstract principles.** Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (1981) emphasizes practices, character formation, the narrative unity of a life, and traditions of inquiry. Moral competence involves learning to recognize and pursue goods within shared activities.

This does not make every tradition correct. Traditions can experience internal failures and encounter superior arguments. But their accumulated moral experience cannot simply be treated as irrational material awaiting replacement.

For this approach, a central empirical question is whether families, professions, schools, and associations cultivate honesty, courage, justice, and practical judgment—not merely whether respondents endorse universal propositions. [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “MacIntyre”](#)

**Bernard Williams challenges the ambitions of systematic moral theory from another direction.** In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985), he questions whether one universal

system can adequately capture ethical life, including personal commitments, historical experience, and concepts such as betrayal, cruelty, or courage.

Jonathan Dancy's particularism is distinct but also resists an exclusively principle-centred model. It stresses that the moral significance of a consideration may depend on context. Neither position simply equates rightness with majority opinion; both question whether sound judgment requires a comprehensive set of universal rules. [“Bernard Williams”](#); [“Moral Particularism”](#)

**Natural-law ethics demonstrates why universal morality must not be equated with secular liberal morality.** Natural-law approaches defend standards grounded in human goods and practical reason that apply beyond local acceptance. They can criticize public opinion while also defending some inherited norms.

Consequently, a dispute over family obligations or the beginning and end of life may be a conflict between **different universalist arguments**, rather than between universal morality and unthinking tradition. Universal scope alone does not determine a theory's substantive conclusions. [“The Natural Law Tradition in Ethics”](#)

There are also particularly relevant formulations in individual European intellectual settings. These are representative contributions, not claims that each country possesses one national moral theory.

| Intellectual setting and author          | Contribution to the relationship                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Spain: Adela Cortina</b>              | Shared minimum requirements of justice can coexist with diverse, more comprehensive ideals of happiness and the good life.                            |
| <b>France: Paul Ricoeur</b>              | The aspiration to live well requires testing through moral norms, while applying those norms requires practical wisdom.                               |
| <b>Italy: Carla Bagnoli</b>              | Kantian constructivism explains justification through practical reasoning rather than either prevailing opinion or arbitrary philosophical invention. |
| <b>Netherlands: Albert W. Musschenga</b> | Empirical investigation improves ethics' sensitivity to context and helps assess the epistemic value of ordinary moral intuitions.                    |
| <b>Czech Republic: Jan Sokol</b>         | Ethical reflection must address life, responsibility, and institutions, extending beyond isolated individual decisions.                               |
| <b>Hungary: Ágnes Heller</b>             | Moral personality and the choice to become a decent person are central to understanding morality under modern conditions.                             |

Cortina's distinction is especially useful. Her *ética mínima* does not propose replacing everyone's moral life with a complete official philosophy. It distinguishes requirements of justice needed for coexistence from diverse ideals of fulfilment. Shared civic morality can therefore embody universal aspirations without requiring unanimity about religion, happiness, or the meaning of life. [Cortina, \*Ética mínima\*](#)

Ricoeur similarly avoids choosing between ethical experience and universal norms. In *Oneself as Another* (1990), the pursuit of a good life with others and within just institutions must pass through normative scrutiny; difficult conflicts then require situated judgment. [“Paul Ricoeur”](#)

Bagnoli's work shows how an Italian contribution to universalist ethics can make justification central without treating moral principles as commands manufactured by an intellectual elite. Musschenga's Dutch contribution approaches the problem through empirical ethics: understanding participants' experiences matters, but making ethics sensitive to context is not identical to making local opinion the final standard. [Bagnoli, "Constructivism in Metaethics"; Musschenga, "Empirical Ethics, Context-Sensitivity, and Contextualism"](#)

Sokol's *Ethics, Life and Institutions* draws attention to responsibilities embedded in social organization. Heller's account of moral personality, meanwhile, emphasizes a person's commitment to goodness under conditions in which inherited concrete norms no longer supply an uncontested guide. Both approaches make ethical life richer than conformity to an abstract code. [Sokol, publisher's description; Interview with Heller on morality](#)

**The strongest version of your concern concerns authority rather than universality itself.** Claiming that a norm is universally valid is one thing; claiming that a profession or institution is entitled to impose its interpretation is another.

We should distinguish:

- **Justificatory authority:** whether an argument gives good reasons.
- **Epistemic authority:** whether someone has relevant competence in evaluating those reasons.
- **Institutional authority:** whether someone is entitled to make binding decisions.
- **Moral character:** whether someone behaves well.

None automatically entails the others. A philosopher may present a sound criticism without acquiring a right to govern. A democratically authorized institution may make a morally mistaken decision. An ordinary citizen may display admirable moral judgment without theoretical expertise.

There is a corresponding difficulty on the other side: the social embeddedness of a norm does not protect it from criticism. Norms can sustain cooperation while also excluding outsiders or entrenching unequal treatment. Their integrative function and their justification need separate assessment.

My assessment is that the most defensible relationship is **reciprocal but not symmetrical**: public morality supplies much of the experience, motivation, vocabulary, and practical knowledge on which ethical reflection depends; critical reflection tests its consistency, its factual assumptions, and its treatment of those affected. Neither popularity nor professional status settles the result.

A study designed to test your hypothesis directly would therefore need to measure, within each country, **moral convictions, reasons for those convictions, responses to counterarguments, actual conduct, and the corresponding positions of moral philosophers**. It would also need longitudinal evidence before attributing changes in public morality to philosophers, schools, churches, law, or media.

The figures currently available illuminate important parts of that relationship. They do not establish that millions of ordinary Europeans possess only a morally inferior residue, or that

adherence to a professional philosopher's universal system is a necessary condition of living morally.

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*What theories and research have emerged among the moral researchers of Spain, Italy, the Dutch, the Poles, the Czechs, and in the other Eastern European countries in recent decades with regard to this question? Please go into great detail about this in your answer.*

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**The research in these countries does not support a single progression from “outdated public morality” to “true universal morality.”** It reveals a dispute about where moral authority comes from: universal justification, conscience, shared experience, relationships of care, or the practices that sustain social life. Several influential researchers explicitly resist treating ordinary morality as material that professional philosophers may simply discard.

I will use *public morality* to mean the moral convictions and expectations actually circulating in society, rather than specifically the morality of public officials. I will concentrate on developments since approximately the 1980s, including earlier foundations where necessary. The national groupings identify intellectual settings; they should not be mistaken for unified national schools.

One distinction is essential throughout. **Universal validity, widespread acceptance, and actual observance are three different things.** A principle may claim validity for everyone while remaining unpopular. A widely accepted rule may be unjust. Someone may behave responsibly without knowing any philosophical theory. Consequently, sociological findings cannot directly establish how many people possess “true morality.”

**In Spain, the central contributions concern civic agreement, dissent, moral character, and deliberation.**

Adela Cortina provides one of the clearest answers to your question. In *Ética mínima* (1986), she distinguishes between a shared minimum of justice and different comprehensive ideals of happiness or the good life. Citizens need not share one religion or one philosophy of human fulfilment, but they must be able to justify the terms on which they live together.

Her civic minimum is therefore neither the statistical average of existing opinions nor an exhaustive philosophical morality imposed on everyone. It concerns obligations that can legitimately be demanded of all, while leaving room for different ways of living. Existing public morality supplies convictions and practices from which discussion begins, but those convictions remain subject to criticism. [Cortina, \*Ética mínima\*.](#)

Cortina subsequently addressed a weakness in purely argumentative accounts: people may acknowledge a principle without being moved to follow it. *Ética de la razón cordial* (2007) connects justification with recognition, feeling, and moral courage. Her later cosmopolitan ethics gives particular weight to vulnerability and compassion.

For your question, this adds a third task alongside discovering principles and measuring agreement: explaining how principles become effective motivations. A society whose members formally endorse human dignity but remain indifferent to suffering has not solved its moral problems through correct declarations. [Publisher's description of \*Ética de la razón cordial\*](#); [Cortina on cosmopolitan ethics](#).

Javier Muguerza offers a different emphasis. In *Desde la perplejidad* (1990), subsequently represented in English by *Ethics and Perplexity*, he challenges excessive reliance on consensus. Moral progress may begin with a person's refusal to accept what everyone else regards as normal.

His emphasis on dissent is especially relevant where accepted arrangements degrade individuals. The dissenter's objection cannot be dismissed merely because society has reached agreement. Yet this is not a defence of arbitrary preference: dissent draws force from resistance to the instrumental treatment of persons.

The contrast with Cortina is one of emphasis. Cortina asks how a plural society can justify common obligations; Muguerza asks how conscience can resist even a settled agreement. Both permit criticism of public morality, but neither makes the professional philosopher's social position a sufficient source of authority. Muguerza, *Ethics and Perplexity*.

Victoria Camps shifts attention toward the character needed to sustain moral commitments. *Virtudes públicas* (1990) and *El gobierno de las emociones* (2011) examine the dispositions and emotions through which ethical life becomes possible. Knowing rules is insufficient if people lack responsibility, sympathy, or the capacity to respond appropriately to injustice.

Her approach gives education and ordinary social formation a constitutive role. Everyday moral life is not simply a collection of mistaken opinions awaiting theoretical correction; it is also where people acquire—or fail to acquire—the capacities to act well. Emotions themselves require education and criticism, since they can support prejudice as well as solidarity. [Camps, \*El gobierno de las emociones\*](#).

Diego Gracia develops a practical counterpart through deliberative bioethics. His work on ethical case deliberation resists treating difficult decisions as mechanical deductions from a single principle. Deliberation examines the facts, conflicting values, and available courses of action before reaching a prudent judgment.

Here, practitioners' experiences contribute to ethical reasoning, while established practices remain open to challenge. Philosophical principles guide deliberation without replacing the work of understanding a particular situation. [Gracia, "Ethical case deliberation and decision making"](#).

Spanish empirical research provides a useful check on simplified accounts of moral change. María Silvestre, Iratxe Aristegui, and Usue Beloki at Deusto analysed European Values Study

data in a 2022 study of abortion and euthanasia. Using the 2017–2018 wave, they found that religious self-identification was strongly associated with judgments about these practices.

On a scale from 1, “never justifiable,” to 10, “always justifiable,” the reported Spanish means were 6.0 for euthanasia and 5.9 for abortion, compared with 5.3 and 5.4 in their European comparison. These are mean judgments, not percentages approving the practices. The study also identified patterned associations among attitudes. It establishes changes and differences in moral outlook, **not that one group has reached a philosophically superior stage.** [Silvestre, Aristegui, and Beloki, 2022.](#)

**In Italy, constructivism, secular sentimentalism, and attention to ordinary moral experience offer sharply different answers.**

Carla Bagnoli’s work on practical reasoning and Kantian constructivism represents an influential attempt to explain moral objectivity without equating it with either inherited convention or an independently given list of moral facts.

In constructivist approaches, the crucial question is what principles agents can justify through suitably constrained practical reasoning. The constraints matter: constructing a judgment does not mean inventing whatever rules happen to suit us. Bagnoli’s work foregrounds agency, deliberation, and the significance of other persons in practical thought.

Applied to public morality, this approach asks whether inherited judgments survive reflective justification. Their popularity does not settle their validity, but their historical origin does not automatically discredit them either. Her survey also distinguishes importantly different Kantian and Humean versions of constructivism; they should not be treated as one doctrine. [Bagnoli, “Constructivism in Metaethics”.](#)

Eugenio Lecaldano takes a different route. *Un’etica senza Dio* (2006) argues for the possibility of autonomous moral life without a religious foundation. Drawing on a broadly Humean tradition, he gives moral sentiments, sympathy, and attention to suffering substantial explanatory and normative importance.

His relevance lies in rejecting the assumption that weakening religious authority necessarily leaves only selfishness or arbitrary choice. People can develop ethical responsibility through human capacities and relations. But this is also different from saying that morality becomes authentic only when purified of emotion and expressed as universal rational rules. [Lecaldano, \*Un’etica senza Dio\*; discussion of the book’s argument.](#)

Piergiorgio Donatelli’s work, informed by Wittgenstein and writers such as Iris Murdoch, challenges another assumption: that ethical understanding primarily consists in selecting and applying a moral theory. His work on forms of life examines the relations between language, experience, and the ways reality becomes morally intelligible.

This gives ordinary experience more than evidential value. How someone describes humiliation, acknowledges another person, or comes to notice suffering can itself be an ethical achievement. Moral change may involve transformed perception and language, rather than merely replacing one proposition with another.

Such an approach does not sanctify existing customs. It questions whether criticism can proceed adequately without examining the forms of life through which concepts acquire meaning. [Donatelli, “Forms of Life, Forms of Reality,” 2015; “Reshaping Ethics after Wittgenstein”](#).

The Italian comparison therefore cuts across the original binary. Bagnoli foregrounds justified practical reasoning; Lecaldano highlights human moral sentiments; Donatelli investigates the texture of ethical understanding. None of these positions can be adequately described simply as accepting or rejecting “the morality of the masses.”

**In the Netherlands, researchers have made the relationship between moral theory and empirical inquiry an explicit methodological problem.**

Albert—or Bert—Musschenga is particularly important. His 2005 article “Empirical Ethics, Context-Sensitivity, and Contextualism” distinguishes using empirical information to improve ethical judgment from the stronger philosophical claim that justification is intrinsically dependent on context.

This distinction prevents a common mistake. A universalist can need detailed empirical knowledge: one cannot assess fairness in an institution without understanding how it operates. Conversely, gathering interviews does not itself produce a justified moral conclusion.

Musschenga’s work on moral intuitions and expertise also asks when initial judgments deserve evidential weight. Neither professional expertise nor ordinary conviction should be regarded as infallible. Both require examination of the conditions under which judgments arise and the reasoning supporting them. [Musschenga, 2005; “The Epistemic Value of Moral Intuitions,” 2010](#).

Guy Widdershoven, Tineke Abma, and Bert Molewijk develop a more explicitly dialogical approach. Their “Empirical ethics as dialogical practice” (2009) treats the experiences of patients, professionals, and other participants as contributions to ethical inquiry.

Participants do more than provide data for a philosopher’s later verdict. Through structured reflection, they may clarify assumptions, encounter other perspectives, and revise their understanding. The ethicist helps sustain this inquiry.

This is not equivalent to taking a vote. An agreement can remain ethically defective if relevant people are excluded or unequal power prevents their experiences from being heard. The methodological ambition is reflective learning within practice. Widdershoven, Abma, and Molewijk, 2009.

Marian Verkerk’s care ethics adds a critique of overly self-sufficient pictures of autonomy. People exercise agency through relationships, support, and sometimes dependence. The ethical question is consequently not exhausted by whether an isolated individual has formally made a choice.

For your question, this means that ordinary caring practices can contain moral knowledge that highly abstract models overlook. Those practices nevertheless need scrutiny: care can become paternalistic, coercive, or unfairly distributed. [Verkerk, “The care perspective and autonomy,” 2001](#).

A particularly relevant empirical contribution comes from Tom van den Berg, Maarten Kroesen, and Caspar Chorus at Delft. Their 2022 article asks why general moral values predict concrete everyday moral behaviour poorly. Across three studies, they compared general moral-value questionnaires with self-reported conduct, including activities such as volunteering and informal care. Measures adapted to the particular context performed better than very general value measures.

The implication is methodological: endorsing broad moral statements is an unreliable substitute for studying how people respond in specific circumstances. Because the behavioural measures were self-reported, the study should not be described as direct observation of all the conduct concerned. Nor does weak prediction refute the validity of universal principles. [Van den Berg, Kroesen, and Chorus, 2022](#).

These Dutch contributions address the gap in your original formulation especially directly: **moral validity, moral competence, and successful moral action require different kinds of investigation.**

**In Poland, personalism, conscience, responsibility, and the sociology of religious change are central.**

The personalist tradition associated with Karol Wojtyła, Tadeusz Styczeń, and Andrzej Szostek resists reducing morality to accepted conventions. It locates moral obligation in the dignity of persons and connects freedom with responsiveness to truth.

For Styczeń and Szostek, conscience is not simply the faculty of inventing one's preferred values. Its authority involves recognizing what one has reason to acknowledge as true and binding. This allows criticism of both social conformity and arbitrary self-assertion.

This tradition illustrates why *universal morality* cannot simply mean *secular or progressive morality*. Religious personalists also claim that moral obligations transcend local approval. The dispute concerns the justification and content of those obligations. [Study of Wojtyła and Styczeń's personalism](#); [Szostek, "Normatywna moc prawdy"](#).

Józef Tischner's *Etyka solidarności* (1981), published in English as *The Spirit of Solidarity*, connects moral reflection with the lived experience of solidarity. Its central concern is the response to another person's suffering and the formation of a community of conscience.

Solidarity, on this account, acquires ethical significance through responsibility toward others, especially those who have been wronged. Mere group cohesion is insufficient. A tightly unified group can still act unjustly.

Tischner therefore complicates the opposition between public morality and critical morality: a social movement can embody moral discovery, while conscience remains capable of judging the community itself. [Tischner, \*The Spirit of Solidarity\*](#).

Zygmunt Bauman—Polish-born, although much of his later career was in Britain—offers a markedly different approach in *Postmodern Ethics* (1993). He questions the ambition to resolve moral uncertainty through comprehensive ethical codes.

His concern is that responsibility can be displaced by rule-following: people may regard compliance with an institutional role as sufficient even when their conduct harms others. Ethical life retains ambiguity and demands personal responsiveness that no code can fully absorb.

Bauman's position is therefore not adequately described as "anything goes." He challenges the identification of moral responsibility with obedience to a theoretically complete or administratively enforced system. [Bauman, \*Postmodern Ethics\*](#).

Janusz Mariański supplies an empirical counterpoint. His research investigates whether religious identification and moral judgment remain closely connected. In a 2015 analysis drawing on Polish surveys, including CBOS research, he found evidence of increasing moral autonomy and selective acceptance of Catholic teachings.

His conclusion was qualified: the relationship cannot be captured by a simple choice between dependence and complete independence. Religious affiliation, declared beliefs, and judgments about marriage, family, and reproductive questions do not change at identical rates.

This matters because "Polish public morality" cannot safely be inferred from Poland's religious identity. Nor can divergence from Church teaching be treated, without further argument, as either moral decline or moral advancement. [Mariański, "Religia i moralność w świadomości Polaków. Zależność czy autonomia?," 2015](#).

Bogdan Wojciszke's social-psychological research, including work with Andrea Abele, asks how people evaluate themselves and others through agency and communion. Moral qualities are especially consequential in judgments of other people, while competence and effectiveness have distinctive importance in judgments involving the self.

This investigates the structure of everyday evaluation rather than the ultimate validity of its standards. It nevertheless helps explain why people may demand trustworthiness from others while excusing their own conduct through appeals to effectiveness or circumstances. [Abele and Wojciszke, 2014](#).

**In Czech research, moral experience and institutions figure prominently alongside unusually valuable longitudinal survey work.**

Jan Sokol's *Ethics, Life and Institutions*, available in English in 2016, is particularly relevant. It examines ethical life through human practices and the institutions that make sustained cooperation possible.

The significance of this approach is that responsibility cannot be understood entirely through exceptional dilemmas or isolated choices. People inherit languages, expectations, and institutions that enable action before they begin explicitly theorizing about it. Ethical reflection must investigate these inheritances and the obligations arising within them.

Read in relation to your question, Sokol offers an alternative to treating everyday morality as a disposable preliminary stage. Its social embodiment matters, even though inherited expectations require criticism. [Sokol, \*Ethics, Life and Institutions\*](#).

Erazim Kohák's environmental ethics, including *The Green Halo* (2000), broadens the issue of moral scope. He examines how humans understand their place in the living world and how this affects their treatment of animals and nature.

Here, the limitation of public morality may concern whom or what it recognizes as morally significant. But the correction involves attention to experience and ways of inhabiting the world, as well as explicit argument. Universal concern need not mean abstraction from lived relations. [Kohák, \*The Green Halo\*](#).

For empirical research, Ladislav Rabušic and Beatrice Elena Chromková Manea's *Values and Attitudes in the Czech Republic 1991–2017* is a major resource. Published in 2018, it assembles repeated European Values Study surveys using representative samples.

Its contribution is the ability to examine continuity and change over time rather than infer a national moral character from a single survey. The authors describe the sourcebook as a foundation for investigating value preferences and testing hypotheses—not as a ranking of citizens' moral worth. [Rabušic and Chromková Manea, 2018](#).

**Slovakia offers an identifiable original theory: Vasil Gluchman's ethics of social consequences.**

Gluchman develops a form of consequentialism that he distinguishes from utilitarianism. Humanity, human dignity, and positive social consequences occupy central positions, alongside responsibility, justice, and tolerance.

The point is not simply to maximize pleasure or satisfy whatever preferences a population happens to possess. Accepted rules are assessed through their consequences in relation to substantive ethical values.

His approach therefore rejects convention as a sufficient justification while also resisting an exclusively formal account of obligation. It requires judgments about what counts as humane and socially beneficial conduct. That requirement exposes a question consequentialism must answer: how are the values used to assess consequences themselves justified? [Gluchman, "Humanity and Moral Rights"](#).

**Hungarian discussions include both a defence of public morality's theoretical standing and an ethics centred on becoming a good person.**

Béla Pokol's *Moráleméleti vizsgálódások* (2010) addresses your question almost explicitly: its subtitle is *A critique of the theoretical elimination of public morality*. His related work on law and morality belongs directly in a discussion of whether philosophical reconstructions displace the moral rules through which society actually operates. [Bibliographic record of Pokol's "Jog és morál," 2011](#).

The issue raised by this challenge should be separated into two propositions. One is that a theory of morality is incomplete if it fails to account for socially maintained expectations, internalization, and sanctions. The other would be that existing expectations are therefore morally correct. The first proposition does not establish the second.

Conversely, a philosopher may successfully criticize a customary rule without showing how an alternative will acquire social authority and motivate conduct. This is a substantive problem for accounts that concentrate almost entirely on justification.

Ágnes Heller approaches morality through a different sequence of questions. Her ethical writings investigate general moral orientation, the choice to become a good person, and the individuality of ethical lives. *An Ethics of Personality* (1996) explores the relationship between general ethical demands and irreducibly personal ways of living.

In her reflections on goodness, the existence and example of good people matter. Philosophical ethics does not manufacture moral life from nothing. Yet being a good person can require resisting one's circumstances and refusing to commit injustice.

Heller thus leaves room for demanding moral standards without assuming that every ethically admirable life must instantiate the same comprehensive blueprint. [Heller, \*An Ethics of Personality\*](#); [interview on morality](#).

**In Slovenia, the debate has often taken the form of questions about principles, intuition, and particular circumstances.**

Vojko Strahovnik's work on moral judgment and intuition is directly relevant. His publications include *Moral Judgment, Intuition and Moral Principles* and contributions to the debate over moral particularism.

The issue is whether sound judgment requires general principles, and what authority should be given to our initial sense that an action is cruel, unjust, or disloyal. Intuitions can be treated as fallible contributions to knowledge rather than either unquestionable truths or mere social prejudices.

Strahovnik has also connected this work with ethics education. This gives a practical setting to the question of how initial judgments can be examined and improved. His research programme should not, however, be mistaken for a population survey establishing how many Slovenians reason in a particular way. [Strahovnik's research and publications](#).

**Croatia has produced a distinctive—and internally contested—programme of integrative bioethics.**

Associated especially with Ante Čović and Hrvoje Jurić, integrative bioethics seeks to bring scientific, philosophical, cultural, and other perspectives into reflection on life and its conditions. Its concept of *pluriperspectivism* resists restricting legitimate ethical input to a single discipline.

For your question, this gives culturally situated experience a place within ethical inquiry. Such experience is not automatically dismissed because it lacks the form of a universal philosophical argument. The programme also seeks broader ethical orientation, extending beyond narrowly defined medical dilemmas. [Čović on the Europeanization of bioethics](#).

But this is not a Croatian consensus. Tomislav Bracanović has criticized integrative bioethics for conceptual and methodological weaknesses, including in “From integrative bioethics to pseudoscience” (2012).

The disagreement raises a general problem: including more perspectives can improve inquiry, but inclusion alone does not establish which claims deserve acceptance. A theory must still explain how incompatible claims are assessed and how evidential standards are maintained. Bracanović, 2012.

**In Romania, feminist ethics and the institutional organization of ethics provide two substantial developments.**

Mihaela Miroiu's *Convenio: On Nature, Women and Morals* (1996; second edition 2002) examines exclusions within inherited moral thought. It connects feminist and environmental concerns and develops her theory of *convenabilitate*, addressing coexistence and relations among living beings.

The central challenge to purported universality is that a theory may present a partial human experience as if it represented everyone. Women's experiences, embodied dependence, care, and nonhuman life can disappear from the conceptual starting point.

Her work consequently criticizes both established social arrangements and philosophical models that reproduce their exclusions. Its relevance is not that situated experience automatically defeats general principles, but that claims to generality must be tested against the lives they overlook. [Miroiu, \*Convenio\*](#).

Valentin Mureşan pursued the practical question of how ethical reflection becomes part of organizational life. His work on ethics management examines codes, ethical decision procedures, training, and the institutional arrangements needed to sustain responsible conduct.

This addresses something neither opinion surveys nor abstract justification can settle alone. An organization can formally endorse sound principles while its incentives and routines frustrate them. Conversely, an ethics code without a defensible rationale can merely formalize existing habits.

Mureşan's programme attempts to connect explicit moral reasoning with operational practices and institutions. [Mureşan's research programme](#).

**Two further examples show why the wider region should not be treated as intellectually uniform.**

In Bulgaria, Plamen Makariev's work on cultural rights and deliberative policy examines the relationship between public justification and cultural difference. His 2013 study asks how deliberation can engage perspectives that do not already share the majority's conceptual assumptions.

This places pressure on both sides of the debate: inherited cultural understandings require scrutiny, but public reason can also become exclusionary if participation requires minorities to translate away everything distinctive about their experience. [Makariev, "Cultural Rights and Deliberative Policy," 2013](#).

In Estonia, the University of Tartu's ethics-education work associated with Margit Sutrop examines how values are formed through school culture, relationships, and reflective practice. The focus extends beyond teaching students definitions of virtues or rules.

Its relevance is the relationship between explicit principles and the implicit moral education supplied by an institution's daily conduct. A school teaches through how it treats people as well as through what it says. This is an educational research and development programme; its existence alone does not establish its effects on national moral behaviour. [University of Tartu, Values, Character and School.](#)

Across these cases, the principal disagreements can be compared as follows. This is my analytical grouping of the authors discussed, rather than their membership in formally unified schools.

| <b>Approach</b>                           | <b>What everyday morality contributes</b>                      | <b>What can correct it</b>                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Civic and constructivist ethics           | Starting convictions and practical problems                    | Justification, reciprocity, recognition                                         |
| Ethics of conscience and dissent          | Experienced obligations and solidarity                         | Resistance to injustice and instrumental treatment                              |
| Virtue, care, and experiential approaches | Character, relationships, sensitivity, practical understanding | Reflection on exclusion, domination, and failed care                            |
| Consequentialist approaches               | Existing practices and knowledge of their effects              | Evaluation through substantive values and consequences                          |
| Dialogical empirical ethics               | Participants' experience and situated knowledge                | Inclusive, critical deliberation                                                |
| Institutional ethics                      | The rules and routines sustaining cooperation                  | Justified procedures, accountability, organizational reform                     |
| Sociology and moral psychology            | Evidence about beliefs, evaluations, and reported conduct      | Better empirical explanation; normative conclusions require additional argument |

**The strongest conclusion concerns how to formulate the research question.** Asking whether societies have abandoned “old morality” for “true morality” combines several questions that these researchers usually separate:

1. Which moral judgments are changing, and among which groups?
2. What reasons do people give for their judgments?
3. Do those reasons withstand philosophical criticism?
4. How closely do professed commitments correspond to conduct?
5. Which relationships and institutions help justified commitments become effective?

The country studies provide substantial answers to particular parts of this inquiry. They do not establish a single European scale running from conventional populations to universally moral populations. More revealing is the persistent question shared across otherwise opposed traditions: **how can moral reflection correct collective life while remaining answerable to the people, experiences, and practices through which morality exists?**

\*\*\*\*\*

*To a level above public morality, the formulation of critical morality, or universal morals, or universal morals, and their dissemination for the improvement of public morality only seems to repeat, to a certain extent, the transformation that has already taken place in the legal sphere from customary law to positive written law created by conscious legislation, and for this purpose the possibility of repeal and the institution of this have arisen, which honestly admits this replacement. What forms can be presented for this positive development of morality, and what theories and analyses have emerged for this in the individual European and American countries? Please elaborate in your answer on the questions that arise here.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Your analogy identifies a real transformation: parts of moral life are increasingly governed by deliberately formulated, institutionally adopted, and periodically revised standards.** This is especially visible in professional ethics, research ethics, corporate governance, public administration, and digital platforms. In these settings, morality acquires some features of positive law: identifiable authors, written texts, procedures of interpretation, enforcement bodies, and mechanisms for replacing earlier rules.

However, the analogy needs a distinction. **An institution can replace its official ethical standard by decision; it cannot, through that decision alone, establish that the new standard is morally justified.** The relationship between these two processes—organized norm production and moral justification—is the central theoretical problem.

I will call the first process *the positivization of morality*, using your terminology in a descriptive sense. It does not mean that the resulting morality is necessarily better. Nor is it the established name of a single international school: the relevant research appears under such headings as institutionalization of ethics, ethical governance, professional self-regulation, norm construction, organizational ethics, and private regulation.

**The legal analogy becomes more precise when we distinguish writing down rules from acquiring the authority to change them.**

Customary law is already “positive law” in the broad sense of socially established law. Moreover, written law does not necessarily originate in deliberate legislative innovation: a written code may record existing customs. The decisive development in your comparison is therefore the emergence of recognized procedures through which authorized actors can create, amend, and terminate obligations.

H. L. A. Hart’s distinction between primary and secondary rules is useful here. Primary rules prescribe conduct; secondary rules determine how rules are identified, changed, and adjudicated. His treatment of morality, however, identifies its resistance to direct legislative alteration as a distinguishing feature: one cannot ordinarily make an action morally permissible

merely by announcing that its prohibition has been repealed. This does not exclude deliberate efforts to change moral beliefs; it distinguishes their persuasive and social effects from an authoritative legal act. [Discussion of Hart's account of legal and moral obligation.](#)

Your question can consequently be sharpened:

Are contemporary societies developing secondary rules for parts of morality—rules specifying who may formulate ethical standards, revise them, interpret them, and judge compliance?

For several institutional settings, the answer is yes. But these procedures usually govern a limited organization, profession, or activity. They do not amount to a generally recognized legislature for morality as a whole.

Consider a hypothetical hospital rule prohibiting staff from accepting gifts above a specified value. Its ethical justification may involve impartiality and the avoidance of dependency. Yet the precise threshold, reporting procedure, and exceptions require institutional decisions. The hospital can alter those details without claiming that impartiality itself has ceased to matter. Conversely, adopting the rule does not prove that the threshold is fair or that its enforcement is impartial.

This example exposes three different layers:

| Layer                     | Central question                              | How change occurs                                             |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moral justification       | What ought people to do, and why?             | Argument, criticism, experience, reconsideration              |
| Official ethical standard | What does this institution require?           | Adoption, amendment, interpretation, withdrawal               |
| Effective social morality | What do people actually regard as obligatory? | Social learning, persuasion, sanctions, changing expectations |

The layers interact, but they can move at different speeds.

### Several forms of positivization can already be identified.

The clearest is **professional codification**. Medical, psychological, legal, engineering, and research communities formulate standards that specify the obligations of members. Where disciplinary bodies interpret and enforce those standards, the analogy with law becomes particularly strong. Their exact legal status nevertheless varies: professional ethics can operate through voluntary membership, employment, statutory regulation, or combinations of these.

A second form is **organizational ethics management**. Universities, businesses, hospitals, and public agencies create codes, ethics offices, complaint procedures, training programmes, disclosure requirements, and review mechanisms. Moral demands become assigned responsibilities and administrable processes.

A third is **ethical authorization before action**. Research ethics committees, for example, assess whether a project may proceed. Their work moves beyond expressing moral advice: an adverse decision can prevent access to participants, institutional support, or funding. The

effective obligation may arise from organizational or funding arrangements even when the underlying principles are presented as universally valid.

A fourth is **public ethical deliberation**. National commissions and citizens' consultations formulate recommendations on disputed questions. These bodies usually do not legislate morality, but they can influence professional standards, public opinion, and subsequent legislation.

A fifth is **transnational standard-setting**. International associations and networks publish norms that acquire practical force through funding, accreditation, procurement, contractual incorporation, or reputational pressure.

Finally, there is **the embedding of normative choices in technical systems**. A platform's moderation rules or an automated decision system can translate contested judgments into operational restrictions. Here one must distinguish the morality of the rule from the authority to operate the system and from the technical capacity to enforce it.

These forms range from advisory reflection to enforceable regulation. Calling all of them "morality" without specifying their institutional basis would conceal precisely the transformation you want to investigate.

**Your point about repeal is supported by concrete examples, although formal replacement need not imply repudiation of every underlying principle.**

The World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki was adopted in 1964 and has undergone successive amendments, including the 2024 revision. Its published text records this history. This is deliberate revision of an authoritative professional ethical instrument, rather than an unrecorded drift in custom. [World Medical Association, Declaration of Helsinki](#).

Canada provides an especially explicit example. The official announcement of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, TCPS 2 (2022), states that it replaces the 2018 version as the policy of the three federal research funding agencies. Here the replacement of the operative ethical text is openly acknowledged. [Canadian Panel on Research Ethics, announcement of TCPS 2 \(2022\)](#).

Similarly, the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity was revised in 2023. ALLEA describes it as a framework for self-regulation, while the European Commission recognizes it as a reference document for research integrity in EU-funded projects. The revision addresses changes in research practices and places greater emphasis on research culture and institutional responsibility. [ALLEA, 2023 revised code](#).

These cases distinguish several things that the word *repeal* might otherwise combine:

- **Replacing an official text:** the earlier edition is no longer the operative standard.
- **Revising an application:** an underlying principle remains, but its practical requirements change.
- **Correcting a previous judgment:** a former rule is now considered mistaken.
- **Responding to changed circumstances:** a rule suitable for earlier conditions is no longer suitable.

- **Withdrawing enforcement:** an institution stops sanctioning conduct without resolving every moral disagreement about it.

Thus, explicit amendment procedures already exist. What generally remains absent is an authority whose repeal decision conclusively settles moral validity for everyone.

**In Germany, Habermas, Luhmann, and Teubner offer three substantially different interpretations.**

For **Jürgen Habermas**, legitimate norm formation depends on justification through discourse. Existing acceptance is insufficient because agreement may reflect exclusion, unequal power, or unexamined assumptions.

Nevertheless, Habermas does not equate morality with whatever a committee decides. His theory of law also distinguishes legal legitimacy from moral validity: democratic legislation involves institutional procedures and practical questions that cannot simply be assimilated to moral argument.

Applied to your hypothesis, this means that ethics committees can institutionalize opportunities for reflection without becoming morally sovereign. Their conclusions remain criticizable, including by people excluded from their deliberations. [Habermas, “Between Facts and Norms: An Author’s Reflections,” 1999.](#)

**Niklas Luhmann** shifts the question from the justification of moral rules to the operation of moral communication. His account examines how people communicate conditions of esteem and disesteem, and how moralization can intensify conflict.

From this perspective, an increase in ethical codes does not necessarily indicate greater moral integration. Organizations may formalize expectations while moral controversy continues around them. Ethical reflection has a critical task: examining the consequences and risks of moral communication itself, rather than merely supplying additional moral demands. [Luhmann, \*Die Moral der Gesellschaft\*.](#)

**Gunther Teubner** comes closest to the institutional implications of your analogy. His work on corporate codes asks whether transnational corporations develop constitutional structures through the interaction of internal rules and external public standards.

The crucial development is the emergence of organized arrangements that both authorize activity and constrain it. His interpretation places some ostensibly ethical codes within processes of private legal ordering and constitutionalization.

That raises a classification problem: once a code has authoritative interpretation, enforcement, and revision procedures, perhaps we are observing the formation of private regulation or law rather than morality simply becoming more explicit. [Teubner, “Self-Constitutionalizing TNCs?,” 2011.](#)

**In Britain, the research supplies both a conceptual objection and a critique of institutional verification.**

Hart provides the conceptual objection already discussed: changing an institutional rule and changing a moral obligation are different achievements.

**Michael Power's** *The Audit Society* (1997) investigates the expansion of formal verification. Organizations increasingly have to render their activities inspectable through procedures, records, and indicators.

Its relevance to ethics is an analytical application: an institution may begin by seeking responsible conduct and end by prioritizing evidence that the prescribed process was followed. Ethical performance then risks becoming identified with auditable compliance. Power's work does not show that every audit is useless; it explains why the growth of verification requires scrutiny in its own right. [Power, \*The Audit Society\*](#).

In digital ethics, **Brent Mittelstadt's** 2019 article "Principles alone cannot guarantee ethical AI" identifies a related problem. Agreement on broad principles does not supply common professional purposes, reliable methods of implementation, or effective accountability.

This limits the idea that publishing a universal ethical code is itself a sufficient reform. Positivation can remain largely declaratory unless standards are connected to responsibility and practice. [Mittelstadt, 2019](#).

**In France, ethical committees and the sociology of justification illuminate different aspects of norm production.**

The **Comité consultatif national d'éthique**, established in 1983, exemplifies the public organization of ethical reflection. Its opinions formulate arguments and recommendations that enter broader political and professional discussion. The committee's advisory role should be distinguished from subsequent decisions by lawmakers or other authorities. [CCNE, institutional account](#).

**Pierre Le Coz**, in "De la bioéthique à l'éthique procédurale," examines the CCNE as a setting in which the credibility and independence of procedures become ethical questions themselves. This is directly relevant to your analogy: once ethical judgments are institutionally produced, the rules of their production require justification. [Le Coz, 2016](#).

**Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot**, in *De la justification* (1991; English translation 2006), investigate how people justify conduct through different orders of worth. Their work challenges the image of one homogeneous public morality confronting one higher philosophical morality.

Institutional codes may settle disputes by selecting or combining standards that were previously in tension. On this reading, codification can stabilize a compromise among competing justifications; it need not express the discovery of one uncontested universal answer. [Boltanski and Thévenot, \*On Justification\*](#).

In the French-speaking Swiss–Belgian setting, **Mark Hunyadi's** *La tyrannie des modes de vie* questions the relationship between ethical scrutiny and the broader ways of living imposed by contemporary institutions. His concern is that individuals may be formally protected while the social and technological arrangements shaping their lives remain beyond effective collective control.

Applied to positivization, the challenge is whether an ethical apparatus critically examines institutional purposes or merely regulates acceptable conduct within already fixed purposes. [Hunyadi, \*La tyrannie des modes de vie\*.](#)

**In Spain, applied ethics is conceived as a public undertaking rather than the exclusive work of philosophical specialists.**

**Adela Cortina's** "La dimensión pública de las éticas aplicadas" (2002) treats applied ethics as a response to social needs requiring cooperation among disciplines and participants.

This is relevant because it locates ethical elaboration inside professional and civic practices while retaining critical standards. An institution cannot simply declare its own customary behaviour ethical. Equally, philosophers cannot adequately reconstruct its obligations without understanding its purposes, participants, and consequences.

Cortina thus supports organized ethical development, but the legitimacy of that development depends on public justification and participation. The proposed institutional morality must remain answerable to those affected by it. Cortina, 2002.

**Diego Gracia's** deliberative bioethics adds that practical judgment cannot be replaced by the mechanical application of written principles. Codes can identify relevant considerations, yet concrete conflicts require attention to facts, values, and possible courses of action.

This places a limit on codification: some ethical competence consists in interpreting situations responsibly, rather than merely checking whether a rule applies. [Gracia, "Ethical case deliberation and decision making"](#).

**In Italy, Lorenzo Sacconi and Cristina Bicchieri address institutional norm construction and its social effectiveness.**

**Lorenzo Sacconi** interprets corporate social responsibility as an extended model of corporate governance. Responsibilities reach beyond a narrow relationship between managers and owners to include other affected parties.

His work connects contractual justification with reputation and reciprocal expectations. The point is to explain both why a corporate arrangement is defensible and why participants might sustain it.

This offers a theory of consciously organized ethical obligations. A code's force cannot be understood from its text alone: governance, expectations, and incentives matter. [Sacconi, "Corporate Social Responsibility as a Model of 'Extended' Corporate Governance," 2004.](#)

**Cristina Bicchieri**, Italian-born and working in the United States, supplies an especially useful empirical theory of norm change. In *Norms in the Wild*, she distinguishes personal attitudes from expectations about what others do and what others expect one to do.

Consequently, announcing a new ethical rule may leave the operative social norm unchanged. People may privately accept the new principle while anticipating punishment or exclusion for acting on it. Conversely, a well-designed intervention may alter collective expectations and make new conduct sustainable.

Her work explains the distance between promulgating a standard and transforming public morality. [Bicchieri, \*Norms in the Wild\*](#).

**In the Netherlands, organizational ethics has become an explicit object of empirical measurement.**

**Muel Kaptein's** research is especially pertinent. His Corporate Ethical Virtues model examines organizational conditions that support ethical conduct. A 2008 study developed and tested eight dimensions, including clarity, consistency of leadership, feasibility, transparency, opportunities for discussion, and sanctionability.

The significant point is that a written code represents only one part of an ethical environment. An organization may communicate clear standards while making compliance practically impossible, or tolerate violations by senior personnel while disciplining subordinates.

Kaptein therefore provides a way to investigate whether institutionalized ethics operates beyond formal declaration. The study tests a model of organizational culture; it does not empirically prove the ultimate validity of the moral standards being promoted. [Kaptein, 2008](#).

The dialogical empirical ethics of **Guy Widdershoven, Tineke Abma, and Bert Molewijk** offers a complementary approach. Participants in practice contribute to ethical learning rather than merely receiving rules. The institutional task includes facilitating criticism and reconsideration.

Their approach suggests that ethical institutions need procedures for revising judgments through experience, alongside procedures for enforcing standards. Widdershoven, Abma, and Molewijk, 2009.

**Central and Eastern European work adds questions of conscience, institutional authority, and the social basis of morality.**

In **Hungary**, this criticism of the theoretical disappearance of *közmorál* gives this inquiry a particularly direct starting point. The further question raised here is whether a theoretically constructed morality remains merely a proposal or becomes effective through universities, professions, courts, public agencies, and other organizations.

A useful extension of that problem would distinguish the authority of an argument from the institutional resources through which its supporters disseminate and enforce it. This is my formulation of the research implication, rather than a claim that every part of it is already contained in your published account. [Pokol, "Jog és morál," 2011](#).

In **Romania**, **Valentin Mureșan's** work on ethics management directly addresses the institutional construction of ethical conduct. Codes, ethical decision procedures, training, and organizational arrangements are treated as connected components. His programme asks how justified commitments can be incorporated into functioning institutions. [Mureșan's research programme](#).

In **Poland**, the personalist ethics associated with **Tadeusz Styczeń and Andrzej Szostek** provides a limit to institutional authority. Conscience is understood through responsibility to truth and the dignity of persons, rather than simple conformity to an authorized code.

Consequently, institutional revision cannot by itself settle whether a person ought to comply. [Study of Styczeń's personalism.](#)

In **Czechia**, **Jan Sokol's** *Ethics, Life and Institutions* directs attention to the inherited practices and institutions that make responsible life possible. Applied to your question, reform must consider what existing expectations accomplish, not merely their lack of explicit philosophical formulation. [Sokol, \*Ethics, Life and Institutions\*.](#)

In **Croatia**, integrative bioethics associated with **Ante Čović** seeks to include multiple disciplinary and cultural perspectives. Its critics, including **Tomislav Bracanović**, ask whether this breadth is accompanied by adequate standards for evaluating competing claims. Together, they expose an institutional problem: greater participation does not eliminate the need for justified criteria of decision. [Čović](#); Bracanović's critique.

These are relevant contributions to your problem, but they should not be presented as national theories all explicitly endorsing "positivization."

**In the United States, the strongest connections are among bioethics, social-contract approaches, and pragmatist accounts of moral development.**

The **Belmont Report** of 1979 is a clear institutional landmark. A national commission articulated principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice and related them to consent, risk–benefit assessment, and participant selection.

Its significance lies in making previously contested or insufficiently articulated responsibilities explicit and administratively usable. The report should nevertheless be distinguished from the regulations and institutional procedures through which research obligations are enforced. Ethical formulation and legal implementation are connected stages, not identical acts. [The Belmont Report.](#)

**Thomas Donaldson and Thomas Dunfee's** integrative social contracts theory offers a layered model. Communities possess scope to develop their own norms, but that scope is constrained by more general moral requirements—"hypernorms."

The attraction is its attempt to combine local norm creation with limits on local abuse. It therefore resembles a constitutional arrangement: communities can formulate rules, but cannot justify everything simply by agreement.

The unresolved issue concerns how the higher norms are identified and justified. If those norms are selected too freely by theorists, the original question of moral authority reappears at the upper level. [Donaldson and Dunfee's account of social contracts in business ethics.](#)

**Philip Kitcher's** *The Ethical Project* (2011) provides one of the most explicit philosophical alternatives to discovering a finished moral order. He interprets ethics as a historically developing social technology arising from problems in human cooperation and limitations of altruism.

On this account, deliberate ethical reconstruction continues a long collective undertaking. Moral practices can be improved without assuming that every legitimate improvement was already contained in an immutable code.

Yet this does not authorize arbitrary norm production. The challenge is to identify defensible ways of evaluating changes and including those whose lives are affected. [Kitcher, “Précis of The Ethical Project”](#).

Finally, **Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal’s** research on transnational governance explains how norms spread through networks of public and private actors. International organizations can influence conduct by supporting and coordinating intermediaries rather than directly issuing legally binding commands.

This offers a sociological mechanism for your hypothesis: ethical standards can acquire extensive practical force through networks without a centralized moral legislature. The authors study governance broadly, not morality alone. [Abbott and Snidal, “International Regulation Without International Government”](#).

**Canada demonstrates particularly clearly how a revised ethical text becomes an institutional requirement.**

The TCPS example combines explicit replacement with research review, training, and institutional implementation. A university may require researchers to update their ethics training when the operative policy changes. Waterloo’s published guidance, for example, connected its requirements to the 2022 version and required relevant updating from January 2024. [University of Waterloo, research ethics requirements](#).

This is stronger than philosophical persuasion: access to an institutional activity is conditioned on compliance with a specified ethical framework. Nevertheless, the official framework remains subject to ethical criticism.

The Canadian case also illustrates why “voluntary” can be misleading. A norm may not be a general criminal prohibition, yet noncompliance can close access to research opportunities. Its practical force must be examined through the institutional relationships that carry it.

**In Argentina, Carlos Santiago Nino connects moral justification with democratic deliberation.**

Nino’s ethical constructivism and theory of deliberative democracy investigate how impartial discussion can improve moral judgment and how democratic institutions relate to human rights.

His relevance is that collective decision has an epistemic dimension: suitably organized deliberation can help identify better answers. But this differs from treating a successful vote as an unlimited source of moral truth.

For your analogy, Nino supplies a justification for institutionalized moral discussion while leaving grounds for criticizing defective procedures and outcomes. [Overview of Nino’s ethical and democratic theory](#).

**In Mexico, Enrique Dussel makes the standpoint of those harmed by an established order central to ethical reconstruction.**

Dussel, Argentine-born and long based in Mexico, develops an ethics of liberation that questions whether an accepted system allows everyone to sustain and develop their lives.

This changes the interpretation of ethical codification. A sophisticated official morality may help stabilize an order whose excluded members experience it as oppressive. Those members' experiences are therefore a source of criticism, not merely a failure to absorb the official standard.

Applied to positivization, the decisive question is whether affected people participate in defining obligations or are simply the objects of someone else's ethical programme. [Dussel, \*Ethics of Liberation\*](#).

**In Brazil, intervention bioethics challenges the international distribution of norm-making authority.**

**Volnei Garrafa and Dora Porto** argue that bioethics in poorer and less powerful societies must address persistent inequality, deprivation, and asymmetries of power. It cannot rely exclusively on frameworks developed around the characteristic problems of wealthy countries. Their argument does not make local custom immune from criticism. It challenges the assumption that internationally prominent standards necessarily exhaust the ethically relevant questions.

For your inquiry, this introduces a geopolitical dimension: who has the resources to formulate standards, publish them internationally, train specialists, and make compliance a condition of participation? A code may claim universality while reflecting a selective institutional agenda. [Garrafa and Porto, "Intervention Bioethics," 2003](#).

**In Colombia, Antanas Mockus provides an unusually concrete programme of deliberately changing civic norms.**

Mockus distinguishes legal regulation, personal moral regulation, and cultural or social regulation. His analysis of their "divorce" addresses situations in which conduct condemned by law is tolerated socially, or personal convictions fail to align with public expectations. His civic-culture approach seeks to change conduct through communication, education, and social responses as well as formal legal measures.

This is a direct example of consciously attempting to reshape public morality. Yet it also shows why promulgation alone is insufficient: the reform must operate on expectations, habits, and interactions. [Mockus, "Divorcio entre ley, moral y cultura"](#).

**The theoretical difficulty is whether official ethical authority can acknowledge its own contingency without abandoning moral seriousness.**

Your observation about the comparative "honesty" of legal repeal identifies an important issue, but three positions should be distinguished.

A moral realist may say: "The former official rule was mistaken; the moral truth did not change." A contextual approach may say: "The circumstances changed, so the same underlying concern now requires different conduct." A pragmatist may say: "We have reconstructed our practices in response to identified failures."

These can be sincere explanations. A changing ethical code does not by itself prove that its authors secretly regard all morality as arbitrary.

The more troubling case arises when an institution combines two claims:

1. Its standards are revisable products of institutional decision.
2. Disagreement with those standards is treated as evidence of moral deficiency, without allowing criticism of the decision.

Here an administrative choice may receive more moral authority than its justification warrants. The problem is not revision itself, but the obscuring of the distinction between an institution's power to decide and the strength of its reasons.

The opposite danger also exists. If every ethical requirement is treated as merely an administrative convention, institutions may evade substantive responsibility by changing their codes whenever compliance becomes inconvenient.

**A comparative research programme should therefore examine the production of standards, their enforcement, and their reception together.**

The relevant evidence would include:

| <b>Object of investigation</b> | <b>Evidence to collect</b>                                                          |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Authorship                     | Membership, appointment procedures, funding, consultation participants              |
| Claimed authority              | Professional mandate, democratic authorization, expertise, organizational ownership |
| Norm change                    | Archived versions, amendment records, reasons given for replacement                 |
| Enforcement                    | Complaint decisions, sanctions, funding conditions, exceptions                      |
| Contestability                 | Appeals, dissenting opinions, opportunities to challenge standards                  |
| Social reception               | Interviews, surveys, practical compliance, resistance, informal expectations        |
| Effects                        | Changes in conduct and harm, with attention to alternative explanations             |

This would allow several competing hypotheses to be tested. Institutional ethical standards may codify an already emerging consensus; they may lead social change; they may impose compliance without acceptance; or they may remain largely symbolic. Those possibilities cannot be distinguished by counting codes alone.

**The most defensible version of your thesis is that modern societies have developed multiple centres of deliberate ethical regulation, some possessing rule-making, interpretive, disciplinary, and revision powers.** Their emergence partly parallels the development of authoritative legal norm production. The unresolved question is whether these centres improve shared moral life through justified and contestable decisions, or convert institutional power into an insufficiently examined claim to moral authority.