

The interplay between how people approach religion and the moods and emotions  
they associate with religion: An exploratory study in Flanders (Belgium)

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#### Abstract

In the epilogue of his influential book, Wulff (1991; 1997) identified four approaches to religion which can be located in a two-dimensional space according to the dimensions Inclusion vs. Exclusion of Transcendence and Literal vs. Symbolic. The present study explores whether the moods and emotions people associate with religion are related to the way in which they approach religion. Results suggest that the inclusion of transcendence is related to associating religion with positive moods and emotions, whereas approaching religion in a literal way is related to associating religion with negative moods and emotions.

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The aim of the present study was to explore whether the way in which people approach religion is related to the moods and emotions that are associated with religion, and if so, how the way in which people approach religion is related to the moods and emotions that are associated with religion. For this purpose, we chose to rely on the theoretical framework of Wulff (1991; 1997). The relationship between moods and emotions associated with religion and the four approaches to religion which Wulff (1991; 1997) described were investigated. As was recently shown by Duriez, Fontaine and Hutsebaut (2000), in countries where everybody grew up in a Roman Catholic tradition, these four approaches to religion can be captured via the Post-Critical Belief scale. First, we will summarize Wulff's theory and introduce the Post-Critical Belief scale. Second, we will attempt to provide a clarification of what exactly is to be understood when speaking of moods and emotions. Because neither empirical research nor proper theorizing was found which directly relate to the research question at hand, the present study was necessarily explorative in nature.

#### Wulff's Classification of Approaches to Religion

In the epilogue of his influential book, Wulff (1991; 1997) argued that the various possible approaches to religion can be located in a two-dimensional space (see Figure 1). The vertical axis in this space specifies the degree to which the objects of religious interest are granted participation in a transcendent reality (Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence). The horizontal axis indicates whether religion is interpreted literally or symbolically (Literal vs. Symbolic). These two dimensions thus define four quadrants, each covering a specific attitude toward religion: Literal Affirmation, Literal Disaffirmation, Reductive Interpretation and Restorative Interpretation (see Figure 1). The upper left quadrant, Literal Affirmation, represents a position most clearly embodied by religious fundamentalism. However, elements of this posture also appear among those who are not particularly conservative. According to Wulff (1991; 1997), this

position, which is partly reflected in scales like Barron's (1963) Fundamentalist Belief scale, can only be sustained by rejecting those who doubt the validity of the conservative view. Therefore, it should not be surprising that literal believers tend to score higher on measures of prejudice and lower on cognitive development, and can be characterized as rigid and low in ability to adapt (see Wulff, 1991; 1997). The lower left quadrant, Literal Disaffirmation, represents a position in which the existence of the religious realm is rejected, but in which the possibility is lost out of sight that the religious language has a symbolic meaning. So, like persons in the first quadrant, religious language is understood in a literal way. The difference lies in the rejection of what is written or said. If anything is made absolute, it is the scientific method and rational and formal principles of knowledge. According to Wulff (1991; 1997), this position is partly reflected in the indiscriminately anti-religious orientation identified by Allport and Ross (1967) as well as in Barron's (1963) Fundamentalist Disbelief scale. People occupying this quadrant tend to be less dogmatic and more intellectual than many of the religious subjects, but also less fair-minded, less capable to evaluate ideas, rather rigid and low in ability to adapt (see Wulff, 1991; 1997). The lower right quadrant, Reductive Interpretation, represents a position in which the existence of the religious realm is rejected, and in which a privileged perspective on the hidden meaning of religion's myths and rituals is claimed. This quadrant is derived from the work of Ricoeur (1965), who proposed that in modern hermeneutics, in order to clear away from religious symbols the excrescence of idolatry and illusion, a reductive interpretation is necessary. In this respect, Ricoeur refers to the so-called Masters of Suspicion (Marx, Freud, & Nietzsche). Wulff (1991; 1997) draws on findings obtained with scales such as Batson's (1976) Quest scale and Barron's (1963) Enlightenment Disbelief scale to fill out a portrait of persons in this quadrant, and concludes that these persons are complex, socially sensitive and insightful, relatively unprejudiced and original. The upper right quadrant, Restorative Interpretation, represents a position in which the existence of the religious realm is affirmed, but in which one tries to encompass and transcend all possible reductive interpretations in order to find the symbolic meaning of the religious language. Again, this quadrant is derived from the work of Ricoeur (1965), who proposed that in modern

hermeneutics, in order to make it possible for the object of suspicion to be restored to an object of understanding and faith, a restorative interpretation is necessary. In this respect, Ricoeur introduced the concept of Second Naiveté. According to Wulff (1991; 1997), characterizing persons who occupy this position is quite difficult, for until recently, they have largely been neglected in empirical research. Nevertheless, this posture might be represented by Fowler's (1981) fifth stage (conjunctive faith). Research with scales designed to operationalize this stage might therefore cast light on this position.

#### The Post-Critical Belief scale

Building further on the theorizing of Wulff (1991; 1997), Hutsebaut and his colleagues constructed a questionnaire—the Post-Critical Belief scale – that captures four different approaches to Roman Catholic religion that map onto Wulff's scheme: Orthodoxy, External Critique, Relativism and Second Naiveté (see Duriez, Fontaine & Hutsebaut, 2000). Orthodoxy is located in the upper left quadrant, External Critique is located in the lower left quadrant, Relativism is located in the lower right quadrant, and Second Naiveté is located in the upper right quadrant (see Figure 1).

...insert Figure 1 about here...

#### Moods and Emotions

Whereas both moods and emotions are temporary states, moods tend to last longer, and are experienced as less intense than emotions (see Frijda, 1999; Sonnevile, Schaap & Elshout, 1985). But perhaps the most important feature in the distinction between moods and emotions is that emotions are seen as clearly resulting from specific antecedents, as having a clear cause, whether it be an object or a specific event. Moods, on the other hand, most often have unclear antecedents (see Frijda, 1999; Sonnevile, Schaap & Elshout, 1985). It could be argued that moods are generalized emotions. However, when it comes to measuring moods and emotions, the existing theoretical definitions and differences are of little use. Both the duration and the intensity of a mood or an emotion are situated on a continuum. Moreover it is often unclear whether or not a mood or an emotion is caused by and / or directed at a

specific object or event (Frijda, 1999; Sonnevile, Schaap & Elshout, 1985). Therefore, it should not be surprising that a lot of words can be used to indicate both moods and emotions (Sonneville, Schaap & Elshout, 1985). Hence, the distinction between moods and emotions is to a vast degree artificial.

#### Method

##### Samples

The 226 (109 males, 117 females) participants used in this study were assembled by undergraduate students of the Theological Faculty of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium) who asked their parents, neighbors and close friends to participate. Full confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Refusal rates were very low (<10%), and all questionnaires were checked for three kinds of response biases: Acquiescence (yeah saying), denial (no saying) and avoidance (sticking to the neutral point). Only few subjects needed to be excluded on any of these grounds (<2%). All participants had Belgian nationality and belonged to the Flemish-speaking part of the country. Participants averaged 34 years old (SD=15, ranging from 16 to 72). Church attendance was very high in comparison to the general population: 50% of the participants indicated to go to Church weekly or at least often, 34% indicated to go to Church on special occasions only, and only 16% indicated to never go to Church.

##### Measures

Participants completed the revised 33 item Post-Critical Belief scale (see Duriez et al., 2001), consisting of four subscales: Orthodoxy, External Critique, Relativism and Second Naïveté. All items were scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1=completely opposed, 4=neutral, 7=completely in agreement). Estimates of internal consistency (Cronbach alpha's) were .75 for Orthodoxy (Mean=2.57, SD=1.06) (8 items), .83 External Critique (Mean=2.71, SD=1.11) (9 items), .60 for Relativism (Mean=5.13, SD=0.82) (8 items), and .72 for Second Naïveté (Mean=5.38, SD=0.94) (8 items). Orthodoxy was unrelated to External Critique ( $r=.00$ , n.s.), negatively related to Relativism ( $r=-.48$ ,  $p<.0001$ ) and positively related to Second Naïveté ( $r=.20$ ,  $p<.001$ ). External Critique was unrelated to Relativism ( $r=.12$ , n.s.) and negatively to Second Naïveté ( $r=-.51$ ,  $p<.0001$ ). Relativism and Second Naïveté were unrelated ( $r=.07$ , n.s.).

Participants also completed a questionnaire assessing a variety of moods and emotions that can meaningfully be associated with religion. This questionnaire was constructed by students of the Theological Faculty of the Katholiek Universiteit Leuven during a series of seminars in which they were made familiar with empirical research. Based on an existing Dutch mood adjective checklist – the Amsterdamse Stemningslijst (ASL60) (Sonneville, Schaap & Elshout, 1985) – they constructed a checklist to measure moods and emotions that can be associated with religion. In total, they constructed nine different emotion scales, each consisting of five items (see Table 1). Participants were asked to indicate, on a 7-point Likert scale (1=I do not associate this mood / emotion with religion at all, 7= I strongly associate this mood / emotion with religion), to which extent they associated all of these moods and emotions with religion. Estimates of internal consistency (Cronbach alpha's) were .78 for Indifference (Mean=2.12, SD=1.15), .83 for Elation (Mean=5.16, SD=1.09), .75 for Social Affection (Mean=5.56, SD=0.91), .83 for Communitarian (Mean=5.29, SD=1.20), .72 for Concentration (Mean=4.50, SD=1.24), .75 for Fear (Mean=2.52, SD=1.12), .75 Guilt (Mean=2.38, SD=1.16), .65 for Aggression (Mean=2.42, SD=1.15), and .73 for Depression (Mean=2.15, SD=1.02). These scales were subsequently submitted to a principal component analysis: A principal component analysis with orthogonal (varimax) rotation was conducted on the two components that were revealed by a scree test.<sup>1</sup> The first component consisted of moods and emotions that are generally regarded as positive moods and emotions (Elation, Social Affection, Communitarian, and Concentration). These emotion scales all had a loading of at least .70 on this component and less than .30 on the second component. Indifference also loaded on this component, but to a somewhat lesser extent, and negatively. The second component consisted of the moods and emotions that are generally regarded as negative moods or emotions (Fear, Guilt, Aggression, and Depression). These emotion scales all had a loading of at least .70 on this component and less than .30 on the first component. On the basis of this analysis, two higher order scales were computed. The first higher order scale was constructed by averaging the scores on the scales Elation, Social Affection, Communitarian and Concentration, and the second higher order scale was constructed by averaging the scores on the scales Fear,

Guilt, Aggression, and Depression. Estimates of internal consistency (Cronbach alpha's) were .87 for Component 1 (Mean=4.88, SD=0.90) and .83 for Component 2 (Mean=2.37, SD=0.88). Both components were unrelated ( $r=-.12$ , n.s.).

...insert Table 1 about here...

## Results

### Bivariate Correlations

The relations between both the two components and the various scales on the one hand and the four approaches to religion as captured by the Post-Critical Belief scale on the other hand were investigated by means of bivariate correlations. The results of these analyses can be found in Table 2. This table shows that both Orthodoxy and Second Naiveté are positively related to Component 1 and that both Orthodoxy and External Critique are positively related to Component 2. External Critique was also negatively related to Component 1. Relativism was unrelated to both components.<sup>2</sup>

...insert Table 2 about here...

When looking at the relationships between the various scales and the subscales of the Post-Critical Belief scale, Table 2 shows the following. Orthodoxy was positively related only to some of the scales belonging to Component 1, namely Communitarian and Concentration, whereas it was positively related only to some of the scales belonging to Component 2, namely Fear and Guilt. External Critique was negatively related to all of the scales belonging to Component 1 as well as to Indifference, whereas it was positively related only to some of the scales belonging to Component 2 (Aggression and Depression). Relativism was not related to any of the scales. Finally, Second Naiveté was positively related to all of the scales belonging to Component 1, unrelated to all of the scales belonging to Component 2, and negatively related to Indifference.

## Conclusion

The bivariate correlations presented in Table 2 between the two mood / emotion components and the subscales of the Post-Critical Belief scale – Orthodoxy, External Critique, Relativism and Second Naiveté – allow us to argue that people high on Relativism experience religion as something essentially neutral, people high on External Critique associate negative moods and emotions with religion, people high on Second Naiveté tend to associate positive moods and emotions with religion, and people high on Orthodoxy tend to associate both positive and negative moods and emotions with religion. This implies that inclusion of transcendence relates to associating religion with positive feelings, whereas approaching religion in a literal way relates to associating religion with negative feelings. A visual representation of this conclusion can be found in Figure 2.

...insert Figure 2 about here...

However, this conclusion needs to be nuanced, as becomes apparent when looking at the relationships between the mood / emotion scales and the subscales of the Post-Critical Belief scale (see Table 2). Both Orthodoxy and External Critique were positively related to some of the negative mood and emotion scales only. Moreover, Orthodoxy and External Critique were positively related to different negative mood and emotion scales: Orthodoxy was related to Fear and Guilt, whereas External Critique was related to Aggression and Depression. This suggests that, in order to associate Fear and Guilt with religion, one has to accept the literal existence of the religious referents, whereas when associating Aggression and Depression to religion, one probably expresses anger at and depression caused by what religion does to people. In a somewhat similar vein, Orthodoxy was related to some of the positive mood and emotion scales only, namely Communitarian and Concentration. This seems to point to the fact that whereas people high on Orthodoxy do tend to take their religion seriously, there is little room for joyful and loving moods and emotions. Probably, these joyful, loving moods and emotions, which belong to the scales Elation and Social Affection respectively, are experienced as hedonist and inappropriate. Finally, Indifference turned out to be positively related to External Critique, and negatively related to Se-



cond Naiveté, but unrelated to both Orthodoxy and Relativism. This suggests two things. First, for those high on Second Naiveté religion is far more important than for those high on Orthodoxy. Second, whereas those high on External Critique show very little interest in religion, those high on Relativism seem quite interested in religion. This is clearly in line with the theorizing of Wulff (1991; 1997). If anything is made absolute by those high in External Critique, it should be the scientific method and rational principles of knowledge, so why bother about religious contributions to vital questions? On the contrary, those high in Relativism should mainly be concerned to clear away from religious symbols the excrescence of idolatry and illusion, which almost by definition implies that they are not only interested in the scientific contribution to vital questions, but also in the religious contribution.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The eigenvalues for the first six components, after extraction, were 3.57, 2.45, 0.66, 0.58, 0.47 and 0.39 respectively.
- <sup>2</sup> The relationships between the Post-Critical Belief subscales and the mood and emotion components are neither affected by the age of the subjects nor by their educational level. In regression analyses with the Post-Critical Belief subscales, age and the interaction effects between the Post-Critical Belief subscales and age as predictors and the moods and emotions components as criteria, all interaction effects turned out to be non-significant, both for the positive and the negative moods and emotions component. In regression analyses with the Post-Critical Belief subscales, educational level and the interaction effects between the Post-Critical Belief subscales and educational level as predictors and the moods and emotions components as criteria, all interaction effects were also non-significant for both moods and emotions components.

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Table 1  
The 9 Mood and Emotion scales and the moods and emotions that constitute them<sup>a</sup>

Fear	<i>Fear, Fright, Nervosity, [Overpoweringness], Anxiety</i>
Guilt	<i>Guilt, Sinfulness, Dissatisfaction with myself, Anger towards myself, Regret</i>
Aggression	<i>Anger, Rebellion, [Defensiveness], Annoyance, Frustration</i>
Depression	<i>Pessimism, Helplessness, Unhappiness, Loneliness, Worthlessness</i>
Indifference	<i>Insensitivity, Uninterested, Apathy, [Serenity], Emotionlessness</i>
Elation	<i>Happiness, [Free], Strong, Optimism, Joyful</i>
Social Affection	<i>Friendliness, Warmheartedness, Respect, Love, Forgiveness</i>
Communitarian	<i>Solidarity, Brotherly Love, Sense of Communion, Togetherness, Being concerned about others.</i>
Concentration	<i>Concentration, Seriousness, [Comtemplation], Determination, Meticulousness</i>

<sup>a</sup> Moods and Emotions in square brackets were left out of further analyses because they suppressed the internal consistency.

Table 2  
Correlations between the four Post-Critical Belief subscales on the one hand, and both the two Mood and Emotion components and the 9 Mood and Emotion scales on the other hand

	Orthodoxy	External Critique	Relativism	Second Naiveté
Indifference	-.14	.48 **	.04	-.40 **
COMPONENT 1	.25 **	-.35 **	-.07	.44 ***
Elation	.16	-.33 **	-.05	.33 **
Social Affection	.15	-.31 **	-.03	.37 **
Communitarian	.22 **	-.31 **	-.09	.41 **
Concentration	.30 **	-.27 **	-.09	.41 **
COMPONENT 2	.15 *	.19 *	.06	-.03
Fear	.19 *	.04	.02	.11
Guilt	.19 *	.09	.03	.08
Aggression	-.06	.20 *	.14	-.15
Depression	.09	.28 **	-.01	-.15

N = 226, \*  $p < .01$ , \*\*  $p < .0001$

Figure 1  
Integration of the four Post-Critical Belief subscales in Wulff's (1991; 1997) theoretical model according to Duriez, Fontaine & Hutsebaut (2000)

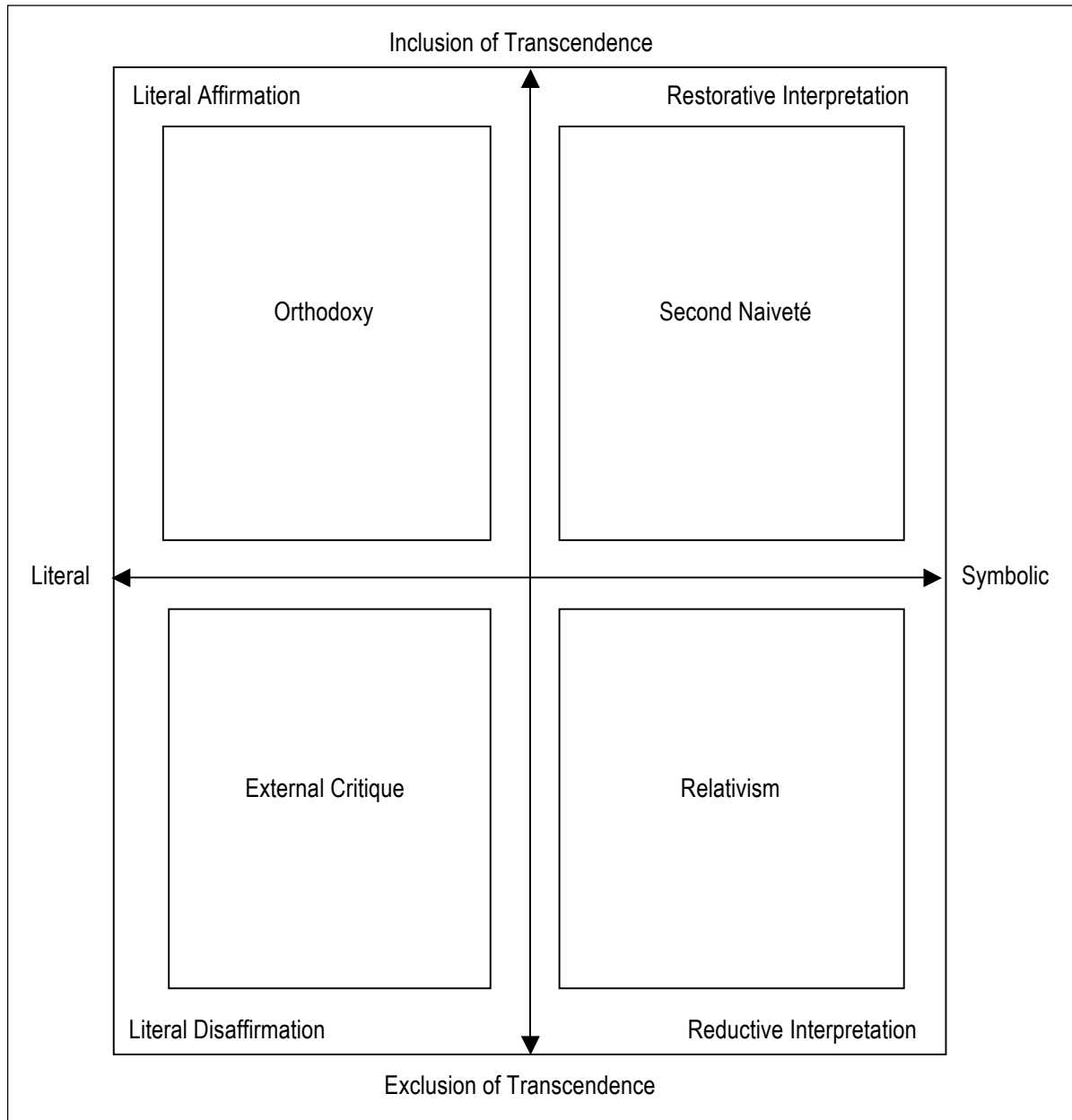


Figure 2

Visual representation of the relation between the two Mood and Emotion components and the four Post-Critical belief subscales in terms of Wulff's (1991; 1997) theoretical model

