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## Question 1: A Critical Approach to Norwegian Values

Every nation of the ~~word~~ world has a set of certain values that are most important to its inhabitants. They are usually made up of different historical, economical and geographical factors. Norway too has a set of certain values that stand out between others, and they are: equality, modesty and nearness to nature. I will now analyse all three of these aspects by examining their positive and negative traits, because criticism can be positive and negative as well.

Equality seems to be very important for Norwegians and this has been like that for quite a long time. To understand why it is so, one has to know some historical facts about Norway. First of all, it is geographically impossible for Norway to be an agricultural country, since most of the land consists of mountains and only 3% of the land are cultivated nowadays. The situation in the past was the same. Farms were scattered all over the country and this made it impossible to form aristocracies in Norway, as it was being done all over Europe. So the positive aspect of this was that the farmers were more equal to others and were very important for the rest of the country, however, from a more negative point of view this is one of the reasons why Norway has been under the rule of their neighbors for many centuries. Since there were no aristocracies, there were no armies to defend the country, as it is said "Norway is a land of houses and cottages, not castles". Another reason why equality has become so important in Norway is because of ~~the~~ certain movements in the 18th and 19th centuries.



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One of the most popular movements was led by Hans Nielsen Hauge, who travelled around Norway by foot popularising Christianity and ~~from~~ helping others start running different business ventures. He was interested in this not because of wealth, but because of the idea that nobody should be poor, everyone should have equal rights to leading a satisfying life. But returning to modern days, equality stands for equal rights to receive education for everyone, equal opportunities to find a job for all people and the salary difference between the wealthiest 20% and the poorest 20% in Norway is one of the smallest in the whole world. All of the people have access to hospitals and health care, in fact 95% of the population are in 1h or less travelling distance away from a hospital. All of Norway's inhabitants also possess an equal right to access housing. All of these notions can be rated positively in my opinion. Another positive trait is the equality of men and women in work as well as education. During the past decades women have become very equal to men when it comes to working possibilities and conditions, there is even a rule that at least 40% of board members in Norwegian companies have to be women. After having said all this one should think that equality is the best possible thing there can be, but is it really so? There are quite a few negative aspects to this value as well. One of them is that a person may find it hard to develop individually in this egalitarian society. Our professor mentioned a very good example in his lecture. He said that his son is very good at playing football, but instead of playing with more skillful players and developing his own skills,



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he is forced to train with players that are worse than him, thus getting into stagnation. The ones that are not really good at playing will never become professional football players, but he actually might have a chance to become one, yet he does not have the chance to develop. Thus, I believe, that equality should be measured to a certain extent ~~for~~<sup>so</sup> it does not interfere with people's personal interests. Another negative aspect of equality, that is not as drastic nowadays, is the assimilation of minorities and indigenous people. For example, the Sámi people have had quite a rough time in Norway in the past. They did not have the possibility to study in their own language and had other social difficulties, but this all changed after the Alto affair, when the Norwegian government decided to build a dam right where the Sámi were living. Strikes followed this decision and in 1889, possibly because of feeling bad for the Sámi, the government allowed the Sámi people to have their own parliament and since then everything has changed and they have become more equal to Norwegians. But here another problem arises, maybe they have become too equal. I personally believe that there should not be 2 flags within one nation. As one can see, equality has ~~at~~ its positive and negative aspects. I believe that people should be equal in certain economical, social and political situations, but when it comes to religion, nationality and establishing oneself as a human being, equality should be practised to a certain extent.

The second value that is important for Norwegians is modernity. This can be mostly observed by the way



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that Norwegians eat. A very popular thing to do in Norway is to eat packed lunch during the break ~~to~~ in one's workplace or school. The packed lunch is called "matpakke". Even the professors with a very high wage will choose to eat a "matpakke" with their colleagues instead of ordering something in the university's cafeteria and this is a very positive trait from an economical point of view, but they do not do it to save money, they do it because of ethic's principles. One of the professors told us a story that I found quite sad. One of his ~~at~~ colleagues had been seen having ~~a~~ lunch in a restaurant and the next day many of the other lecturers were discussing this. Why do so? If one earns his own money, he should be able to spend it anyway he wants to. Although it is said that during the weekend Norwegians tend to forget about modernity to a certain extent. The popularity of this value is probably also stimulated by a Norwegian invention - the cheese slicer. It allows ~~to~~ you to make the smallest possible slice of cheese to put on a slice of bread and make the "matpakke". Even very rich people tend to not spend a lot of money on food. There is a joke that the French go to lunch by scooter and eat a 3 course meal for two hours while Norwegians take their Mercedes-Benz, but eat only "matpakke". I believe that nowadays people tend not to spend a lot of money only when they are around others. This is altogether a good value in my opinion, but it should be practised to a certain extent, ~~and~~ if people have earned their money while working hard, they should also have the opportunity to enjoy spending it.



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The third and final Norwegian value is nature. This can be mostly explained by the wonderful landscape of Norway as well as the nearness of nature. Even here in Kristiansand, the forest and hiking tracks are just in a few minutes walking distance away. Historically the Norwegian love for nature developed in the 19th and 20th century when many people, one of whom was Amundson, challenged the forces of nature by travelling long distances on skis as well as by swimming. They became Norwegian heroes and stimulated the population to go out and observe what is around them on their own. Nearness to nature is practised already from the kindergarten age here in Norway, even special nature kindergartens, where the kids spend most of their time outdoors, have been formed. I believe that this is a very good value, since people are learned to love nature from a very young age and that also makes the population quite sporty: everyday it is possible to see many joggers on the streets and many people ride bikes even when it is raining very hard, hence the Norwegian saying "There is no bad weather, only bad clothes". The love for nature can also be seen in politics, since Norway was the first country in the world to have a Ministry of Environment. But there also are some negative traits to this seemingly perfect value. When Norwegians go on hikes, they do not communicate a lot with each other, but rather keep to themselves and just walk, which what a foreigner might find a little odd and unfriendly. Also the final destination is not the most important factor, but the walk itself is, thus they might not appreciate the landscape as much. Nevertheless, this is a very good and a true



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Although nowadays the values might be changing, as the younger generation might not care about modernity as much as their parents for example and youngsters might not spend as much time in nature, but this is just logical, because the world is evolving and interests are changing.

It also has to be mentioned that these 3 values are not developed by Norwegians, as they can be found in other countries too. But Norwegians are certainly one of the biggest practitioners of them.

### Question 4: Religion in Norway: Historical and Present-Day Perspectives

As a foreigner I have observed that religion and different activities concerning it are very popular in Norway and South of Norway, where I have lived for the past three months, is ~~prop~~ probably the most religious part of Norway. I have not been baptised myself, but I found it interesting to learn different facts about the importance of religion here in Norway and I would like to look at them in more detail.

Religion in Norway can be traced ~~back~~ back all the way to the Viking age. During that time the Norse religion was the leading one in the territory of modern Norway. The vikings believed such gods as Thor, the god of lightning, who possessed some non-human powers and thus gave them strength. There were many gods that people believed in and this is quite similar to Greek mythology in which there were also many different gods possessing certain powers.



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There was no unified nation at that time and the land was ruled by many different chieftains. They believed that the kings were responsible for sunshine, rain and the fertility of land. Thus, when a king died, chieftains from five different regions arrived and wanted to split him in five parts so that each one of them could bury the king in the ground of their land, which supposedly should make it more fertile.

As the Viking age was approaching its end, a viking warrior, Olav Haraldsson, arrived in Norway in 1015 with the mission to unify the country. One of his main goals was to make Norway Christian and he did so by force. At that time Norway was divided by Denmark, Sweden and Earls of Lade, with whom Olav joined forces to complete the unification. But the army of Olav Haraldsson lost the battle of Stiklestad, which turned out to be Olav's last battle, in 1030. But as funny as it might seem, more people started to gain interest after his death, since he was now considered as someone who possesses higher power and was even named Saint Olav after his death. Later many years of Civil war followed, because the inhabitants were not pleased with the way kings were able to get the throne. After the Civil war the king protected the Church and in return the Church acknowledged the king. During the 13th century the Church owned most of the nation's land, which was around 40%. However, during the middle of the 14th century the nation was struck by a horrible disease which also effected the Church. In 1349 a ship & British ship arrived at Bergen bringing the Black Plague to Norway. This horrible



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disease swiped out almost half of the population. Many priests and nuns died during this time, because they took care of the sick, thus becoming infected themselves. But the nation managed to get back on its feet and so did the church, but Norway was now in a union with Denmark, which proved to be very unsatisfactory for the Church in the 16th century. As Lutheranism was rising in Germany and Denmark was next to the West of Germany, the Danish king decided to implement Lutheranism into Norway in 1536-1537. The main reason for this was that he could become the complete ruler of Norway as well as get all the land that belonged to the church. The national council of Norway, the Riksråd, was abolished and the Christian archbishop was forced to flee from the country. The priests were forced to use the Lutheran Bible from now on, and they ~~had~~ and many of them were not happy with this. Nevertheless, from this point on Lutheranism was the state's religion. It was until the 17th and 18th century when things started to change. Movements of Pietism and Enlightenment were rising. Confirmation was introduced and in order for children to be confirmed they had to be able to read the Bible, thus for this reason in 1739 compulsory education was introduced in Norway. During this time, at the end of the 18th century and in the beginning of the 19th century, a very popular movement arose. Hans Nielsen Hauge was a layman who started to travel around Norway on foot from community to community. He had two main goals: popularizing Christianity amongst people and helping lower class people to start their own businesses. He traveled along the southern coast of Norway, which





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is nowadays known as the Bible Belt. His actions were of course against the law, thus he was imprisoned. He had also written a book, which was read by 200 000 people out of 900 000 inhabitants. Even while he was in prison people asked for his help considering entrepreneurship and he was allowed to get out at certain times for this particular reason.

Moving on to nowadays it can be seen that things have changed quite drastically since then. First of all, ~~nowadays~~ nowadays religion is more individualized, there is a very small amount of Christians who go to church on a regular basis and only 10% of religious people in Norway take part in religious activities at least once per month. But that does not mean that per the amount of people who believe in God is decreasing, they just choose to express their faith in different ways.

Since the 1970's there has been a huge rise in immigration to Norway, and this also effects the religious picture in the country. Since there are many immigrants from the Eastern part of the world, the most popular religions in Norway, other than Christianity, are Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and others. Since one of Norway's most important values is equality, religious minorities should not have any problem with integrating into this nation. Many places for them to pray in have been built during the past decade. ~~But it also depends how well they int~~ But the level of integration also depends on them. For example, since Kristiansand is not a big city and the number of minorities is not very high, they seem to integrate well, whereas in Oslo there is a big number of religious minorities, thus they choose to "stick



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together". Nowadays there are no huge problems with the plurality of religions in Norway, but as more people come here in the future, ~~the~~ some threats for the stability of Christianity may arise.

It has to be also mentioned that Christians have their own political party as well, which was established in the middle of the 20th century.

Religion is definitely a much bigger factor here in Norway than in my homecountry and it was very interesting for me to see how people deal with it here.