

Ethics and Morality in Humanistic Studies: A Review

Dr. Tamanna Saxena^{1*}

¹*Associate Professor.*

Abstract

Moral principles are the subject of ethics and morality, a branch of philosophy. The concepts of morality conceptualise human action or character as either right or wrong, good or evil. On the other hand, morals are a subjective and individual concept that varies across cultures, time, and individuals. While some people or societies see certain intentions, choices, and behaviours as moral, others may view them as immoral. The morals and ethics of humanistic studies are reviewed in this article. This review highlights the transformative role of humanistic approaches—such as reflective dialogue, values-based activities, and experiential learning—in cultivating ethical resilience, empathy, and moral reasoning. Evidence from various domains, including education and healthcare, demonstrates the integration of ethical and humanistic practices fosters compassionate, socially responsible individuals. Altruism and reciprocity theories underscore evolving moral behavior in advanced societies, while moderate ethical sensitivity among students reveals room for growth through humanistic care education. Despite progress, moral development remains context-dependent, requiring cultural, systemic, and pedagogical support. The findings affirm that nurturing morality through humanistic education is essential for societal and personal flourishing.

Keywords: Ethics, Morality, Philosophy, Humanistic Studies, Humanistic Approaches, Cultures, Education, Healthcare, and Decision Making.

* ISBN No. - 978-93-49028-92-0

1 Introduction

The history of humanism is lengthy. In an obvious appeal to human potential, men and women have sought to comprehend life and the world, as well as to experience existence as meaningful, since ancient antiquity. Humanism is a philosophy of life that is open to interpretation, particularly since the Enlightenment, and holds that the human viewpoint is essential to comprehending and providing meaning to the world and to existence [1].

The progressive development of contemporary humanism is rooted in a rich tradition of values and concepts. A humanist perspective on life is characterised by an emphasis on discussion, a rejection of dogmatism, and a dependence on one's own abilities for observation and understanding [2]. Justice, freedom, and human dignity are vital concepts. A humanist approach to life also tends to place a high importance on education, culture, self-improvement, and aesthetics. Particularly since the Enlightenment, humanism has been openly recognised as a philosophy of existence that holds that the human viewpoint is essential to comprehending and providing meaning to the universe and to life [3].

An academic discipline known as Humanistic Studies is dedicated to the further development of the significance and meaning of humanism and worldviews in modern society. Humanism is studied broadly and "inclusively" at our institution. Humanist ideals and philosophy are present in both religious and nonreligious worldviews, but they also exist as a separate entity alongside other worldviews [4].

A. Humanism Ethics

The term "humanism ethics" describes an ethical viewpoint that prioritises human values, including the significance of human freedom and dignity. This viewpoint, which emphasises reasoned thought, empathy, and respect for others, is predicated on the notion that people may live happy lives without the need for religious convictions [5]. According to humanist ethics, individuals are encouraged to derive significance from their personal development and human relationships. The idea that moral judgements need to be made using empathy and reason rather than religious doctrine is supported by this [6]. Moral judgements and behaviours are guided by a few fundamental concepts that form the basis of humanist ethics. Here are a few of the main ideas:

- **Human dignity:** Every individual has worth and deserves respect.
- **Rationalism:** Enriching ethical decisions through the application of reason and evidence.
- **Empathy:** highlighting how crucial it is to have empathy and understanding for other people.
- **Autonomy:** defending people's freedom to choose and live by their own ideals.
- **Social responsibility:** Encouraging behaviours that have a beneficial impact on society a whole.

B. Ethics and Morality

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ethics is the study or field of knowledge that deals with moral principles, particularly those that create a system. The study of human behaviour, specifically how individuals behave in society, is the focus of the philosophical field of ethics (Greek ethos: method of

life) [7]. They are ethical rules that dictate how an individual should behave or how an activity should be carried out. The definition of morality (Latin *moralitas*: way, character, suitable behaviour) is the set of rules governing the differentiation between good and poor behaviour or right and wrong. Individuals, communities, and organisations' moral convictions, opinions, and attitudes are what matter [8].

The terms morality and ethics are interchangeable in philosophy. The study of ethics involves methodical consideration of moral principles and standards, as well as how to evaluate institutions, behaviours, and personal qualities. The logical basis for a person's moral assessments of what is good or wrong, fair or unjust, shall be analysed and evaluated by ethics [9]. They serve as a guide for individuals or groups to follow while practicing moral behaviour and as a standard by which ethically dubious choices and acts may be evaluated. These serve as a source of reference and facilitate the instruction of moral behaviour to society members. A society's ethical standards are established through introspection regarding moral principles and beliefs [10]. They are rational and logical because they are based on a methodical examination of moral principles and ideals. Unlike individual morals, they are established in a community as a formal framework to direct a person's conduct and are often universally applicable and objective [11].

C. Key Concepts of Morality

- **Ethical Principles:** Moral behaviour is based on ethical values. Their guidance is instrumental in determining what is morally correct and immoral. Concepts like justice, fairness, and honesty are often included in these values. By offering a precise set of guidelines, they assist people in navigating difficult moral dilemmas. Although they are not always applicable, ethical concepts often influence legal frameworks and social standards. They serve as the foundation of moral philosophy, providing a framework for comprehending human behaviour in a diverse array of situations [12].
- **Rights and Justice:** Moral reasoning is fundamentally informed by the concepts of justice and rights. The term "rights" describes the privileges that people have, including the freedom of speech, liberty, and life. Justice guarantees that society upholds and respects these rights. It is committed to the establishment of a system that ensures that all individuals receive the resources they are entitled to, with an emphasis on treating them with fairness and equality. Beyond maintaining law and order, moral philosophy places a strong emphasis on equitable allocation of opportunities, resources, and duties [13].
- **Utilitarianism:** Utility theory is a moral framework that emphasises the importance of results. It implies that a course of action is morally correct if it benefits the largest number of people. Maximising general pleasure or well-being is the main goal. Individual pleasure is valued, but when making moral judgements, the welfare of the group is given precedence. According to the principle, one must weigh the effects of many options and choose the one that will benefit society the greatest overall. It is often difficult for utilitarianism to strike a balance between the rights of the individual and the larger good [14].
- **Virtue Ethics:** Character is prioritised over regulations in virtue ethics. It emphasises developing qualities like bravery, compassion, and honesty. Developing moral behaviour via positive habits is the aim. Virtue ethics promotes the development of virtuous individuals who,

by nature, act morally, rather than adhering to rigid regulations. The premise behind this strategy is that moral choices will come readily to someone who cultivates the proper character attributes. Growing as a moral individual is more important than adhering to a set of commandments [15].

- **Deontological Ethics:** Duty and moral principles serve as the foundation of deontological ethics. It makes the claim that, regardless of the consequences, certain behaviours are ethically obligatory or prohibited. According to this theory, certain principles are inherently correct, and individuals are obligated to adhere to them, even if it results in suboptimal results. This approach to morality places a strong emphasis on duty, which often entails abiding by categorical imperatives, or laws that are applicable to everyone and without exception. It prioritises moral accountability above contextual results [16].
- **Moral Responsibility:** Being responsible for one's acts is a component of moral responsibility. It calls on people to think about how their actions affect other people. It is expected of people to behave in a manner that respects the rights and welfare of others. Being morally responsible also means having to make moral choices and take responsibility if those choices hurt other people. It is a key component of ethical theories, highlighting the idea that people actively influence their moral surroundings rather than just existing as passive observers of the world [17].
- **Moral Relativism:** Moral judgements are not absolute, according to moral relativism. They are instead reliant on individual, social, or cultural perspectives. Different civilisations or people may have different ideas about what is good or wrong. This point of view casts doubt on the notion that morality is a universal concept. Understanding and tolerance are key components of moral relativism, which acknowledges that moral standards may vary throughout cultures. Critics contend that since it permits differing opinions on what is ethically acceptable, it may result in ethical contradiction [18].
- **Moral Absolutism:** According to moral absolutism, everyone is subject to the same moral principles, regardless of their background or environment. Certain actions are invariably either correct or wrong, according to this perspective. These moral principles are timeless and unaffected by location or time. Absolutists contend that moral truths are real regardless of what people think or believe. Because it looks for a universally applicable set of rules for moral behaviour, this idea stands in stark contrast to moral relativism. The determination and application of these unchangeable moral standards, however, are often questioned by critics [19].
- **Consequentialism:** The concept of consequentialism holds that an action's morality is decided by its results. Instead of the actions themselves, the results are the primary concern. Utilitarianism is a crucial kind of consequentialism that advocates for the greatest amount of happiness for the largest number of people. Proponents of the consequentialist perspective contend that the most advantageous course of action is the correct one. Calculating the advantages and disadvantages of various options is often necessary while using this method. The intricacy of result prediction makes it challenging to employ in practical settings, despite its simplicity in principle [20].
- **Moral Dilemmas:** A moral dilemma arises when an individual is confronted with a situation in which any available option leads to a conflict between ethical principles. Following one moral principle may contravene another in these circumstances. In some cases, an individual may be compelled to choose between shielding the emotions of another individual and telling the truth.

Moral quandaries ask us to prioritise our values and put our moral frameworks to the test. They frequently demonstrate that there is no flawless solution, emphasising the intricacies of ethical decision-making. Applying ethical theories and improving our moral thinking are both aided by an understanding of moral quandaries [21].

2 Literature Review

(Izzati et al., 2025) [22] This case study looks at how a humanistic approach affects SDN Madyopuro 2 students' empathy and ethical resilience. Student academic success and emotional and social development are facilitated by the humanistic approach. The principal's backing and teachers' adoption of a student-centered approach were essential for success. In order to fully realise the promise of humanistic education, these results underscore the need for institutional and cultural changes. The use of humanistic methods in elementary character education is supported by this study. In doing so, it contributes significantly to the conversation on character education by offering practical advice for educational institutions looking to adopt tactics that support students' overall growth.

(Mukherjee, 2025) [3] In this survey, research researchers from Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi who study social sciences and arts and humanities are asked to rate their perceptions on key research ethical difficulties. Lack of awareness regarding ethical concerns, including accountability, informed consent, and transparency, was observed. Because they are unfamiliar with current ethical principles, social science and humanities scholars violate ethical standards. In order to act as a gatekeeper on matters such as informed consent, covert research, potentially sensitive themes, conflicts of interest, and vulnerable participants, this study suggests that a university-level research ethics monitoring council be established.

(Ruyter, 2024) [23] An inclusive humanistic perspective serves as the inspiration for research and instruction at the University of Humanistic Studies (UvH). It seeks the blooming of pupils, to use my own words. I talk about two of the difficulties that a university faces as a result of this goal. In order to respect students' autonomy, the university must first foster humanistic ideals while also cultivating students' desire to put them into reality. Second, it must include both promoting students' thriving and addressing their mental health, while making sure that addressing and avoiding psychological issues in kids does not supersede or even compromise education for flourishing.

(Zhang et al., 2024) [24] Humanistic care skills and a high degree of ethical sensitivity must constantly be maintained in nursing practice. Few studies have examined the relationship between nursing students' capacity for humanistic care and their degree of ethical sensitivity. Undergraduate nursing students' humanistic care skills are somewhat and significantly correlated with their ethical sensitivity, which is at a moderate level. In order to develop exceptional nursing students with a wide range of skills, college nursing educators and administrators should concentrate on combining humanistic care ability education with an increase in ethical education.

(Ederio et al., 2023) [25] The objective of this essay is to examine the evidence supporting ethical research procedures in academic settings. Additionally, this review resulted in the researchers'

conclusion that the level of personal ethics and moral values of a researcher is correlated with the ethical practices and principles of research. They also concluded that the degree of practice and consideration of research ethics varies depending on the nature, purpose, and design of the research in question. Therefore, these ideas serve as a solid foundation for the important functions of "research ethics committees (RECs)" and technical review boards (TRBs) in educational institutions, which guarantee that scientific and academic research conducted in classrooms is quality, credible, trustworthy, and rigorous.

(Wei, 2023) [26] The influence of this condition on human ethics is speculated in this review using one of the most recent moral theories, the notion of morality as collaboration. This study receives some hold predictions via debate. Initially, the fairness principle forecasts the emergence of a society that seems to be selfless. Then, certain principles of distribution suggest that the value of labour will be supplanted by a value that, like labour, is not perceived as significantly unequal due to unmanageable gaps and is predominantly for spiritual purposes. It is unfortunate when a principle is silenced by the inability to forecast social institutions. This conversation could assist individuals in making the required trade-off and minimising the loss in order to have a vital conversation before a significant ethical dilemma arises in the future.

(Rook et al., 2021) [27] Despite the fact that morality research has been conducted for many years, very few studies have examined how the discipline has changed over time, and even fewer have attempted to compile the most recent findings. Filling up these gaps is the aim of this study. The relationship between human social behaviour and the concept of morality is examined in this paper. We look at the evidence for social and biological effects as we analyse the evolution of morality. In addition to discussing the advantages and disadvantages of contemporary morality research methodologies, we also examine Western morality ideas and methodologies. The paper's conclusion examines how morally grounded emotion and decision-making are impacted by social, political, and environmental factors.

(Ellemers et al., 2019) [28] In order to determine which topics and relationships are adequately supported by the available data and which areas of study need more empirical support, we examine empirical research on the (social) psychology of morality. Expert content analysis and standardised bibliometric analysis were used to these in order to categorise research concerns and link them to (trends in) empirical methodologies that define morality research. In order to examine how empirical techniques have addressed the psychological antecedents and consequences of moral behaviour, we have divided the research problems addressed in this literature into five distinct categories. We come to the conclusion that further study is necessary since several important aspects of theoretical issues pertaining to human morality are not consistently covered by empirical studies.

3 Research Gap

Despite extensive discussions on ethics and morality within humanistic studies, significant research gaps persist. Much of the existing literature remains theoretical, lacking empirical examination of how ethical frameworks are applied in real-world contexts such as education, literature, media, and cultural practices.

There is limited cross-cultural and interdisciplinary analysis that explores how moral values evolve and interact across diverse societies. Additionally, the influence of technology, globalization, and shifting social norms on ethical decision-making within humanistic disciplines remains underexplored. Addressing these gaps is essential to developing a more inclusive, dynamic, and practical understanding of ethics and morality in contemporary humanistic inquiry.

4 Research Objective

- To understand the concept of Humanistic Studies, Ethics and Morality.
- To explore the evolution of Ethics and Morality in Humanistic Studies through literature review.

5 Research Methodology

This review paper adopts a qualitative research methodology, utilizing secondary data and an extensive literature review to examine ethics and morality in humanistic studies. The study critically analyzes academic journals, scholarly articles, official reports, and case studies published between 2018 and 2025 to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the subject. By synthesizing interdisciplinary perspectives from philosophy, literature, cultural studies, and education, the paper explores how ethical principles and moral reasoning are constructed, debated, and applied within the humanities. This approach allows for a nuanced evaluation of evolving moral discourses and their relevance in contemporary society.

6 Conclusion

This review highlights the transformative role of humanistic approaches—such as values-based activities, reflective dialogue, and collaborative learning—in fostering ethical resilience, empathy, and moral reasoning among students, especially in educational settings. Experiential and student-centered learning, supported by proactive leadership, is shown to deepen social responsibility and compassionate behavior despite challenges like time constraints and institutional resistance. The review also examines the theory of morality as cooperation, suggesting that principles like reciprocity and fairness evolve in response to societal and technological change, potentially shaping altruistic behavior in advanced material conditions. In healthcare education, particularly nursing, a moderate correlation between ethical sensitivity and humanistic care ability emphasizes the need to integrate ethical training with value-based education to cultivate well-rounded professionals. Higher education institutions, such as the University for Humanistic Studies (UvH), aim to nurture academically and morally developed citizens who contribute meaningfully to society, though outcomes depend on sustained commitment to quality education. The ongoing challenge is the complex interplay of morality with politics, religion, and decision-making. Despite decades of progress in understanding ethical and moral development, the review concludes that the scope of inquiry remains vast, highlighting the continuous need for interdisciplinary exploration in shaping ethical and humane societies.

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