EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS CONCERNS FOR FOSTERING MORAL VALUES THROUGH EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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Abstract. *Today's crisis of orientation and identity is a concern for citizens and for politicians as well, about how to implement moral education as a delicate mission to which family and then the institutionalized environments are called to share with supported efforts. The moral principles that guide a globalized Europe are deeply interconnected with its history, diversity and shared aspirations, these principles being shaped by the challenges and opportunities of globalization and the need for a cohesive yet pluralistic framework that accommodates varying cultural, social and economic dynamics. Europe has a strong commitment to protecting fundamental human rights, as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and other charters and this attitude emphasizes the inherent worth of every individual, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status. Moral principles emphasize mutual respect, intercultural dialogue and the preservation of cultural heritage while fostering integration and social cohesion. Moreover, Europe's experience with conflict has fostered a strong moral commitment to peace building and international cooperation and the European Union, as a continental economic and political union involves in prioritizing diplomatic solutions, conflict prevention and partnerships that promote global and moral stability.*

Keywords: *moral values and principles, social values, cultural values, responsibility*

1. Introduction

Moral values have been considered as foundational to the fabric of society, building individuals' behavior, decision-making, but also broader social dynamics. Within the context of Europe, where diversity and unity coexist, the role of education and training in fostering these values has gained increasing attention. European institutions, such as the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, and also others involved in this concern are at the forefront of efforts to cultivate a moral and ethical framework through educational initiatives and policies. Their attitude reflects not only the commitment to promoting democratic ideals, but also to fostering social cohesion across a diverse and complex continent.

This article explores the concerns and strategies of European institutions in promoting moral values through education and training, examining the effectiveness of these initiatives in addressing contemporary challenges and by focusing on most

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important policy documents, institutional actions and case studies, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these institutions approach the integration of moral education within the broader European educational landscape.

2. Methodological approach

In order to explore this complex issue, a qualitative research technique approach was employed, including a detailed content analysis of relevant policy documents, reports and frameworks issued by European institutions. Additionally, there were presented researchers'views in the field of moral education, conducted to gain insights into the practical implementation of these policies. Data from various European countries were analyzed to assess the impact of educational programs aimed at fostering moral values, and this allowed a holistic and empirical examination of the concerns and strategies of European institutions in this vital area. In order to ground the discussion on moral values in a robust conceptual framework, this article draws upon classical philosophical thought, particularly the works of **Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant**, **Friedrich Nietzsche** and others, because these thinkers provide foundational perspectives on ethics, virtue, duty, autonomy and moral development, concepts that continue to influence contemporary educational philosophy.

These theoretical contributions were not used in isolation, but served as a **philosophical basis** against which the concerns and strategies of European institutions were analyzed. By juxtaposing classical ethical frameworks with contemporary policy discourse, this article seeks to illuminate both the continuities and tensions in the way moral values are fostered through education and training in the European context. The article also draws extensively on **official online documents and communications** published by the **European Commission** and the **European Parliament**, which serve as primary sources for understanding institutional perspectives and policy frameworks. Documents, such as resolutions, strategic plans, recommendations and policy briefings offer direct insight into the ways in which European institutions support and implement moral and civic values through education and training initiatives.

3. A review on moral virtues

Moral virtues refer to the character traits or qualities that enable individuals to act ethically and to contribute positively to the well-being of others and society. Rooted in both philosophical traditions and cultural norms, moral virtues have been considered fundamental to personal development and social harmony. A moral value is a principle or standard that guides people's behavior and decisions, shaping their understanding of right and wrong, good and bad and reflects what individuals or societies consider important for leading a virtuous life. Morality acts as the guiding principle for a functioning societyand without moral values, we would either live in a state of anarchy or a society where we are kept in line only by threats of punishment from a governing figure.

Some of such values can be defined as: honesty, respect, compassion, responsibility, fairness, integrity, kindness, generosity, tolerance, courage and among many others. They can vary across cultures and societies but often share universal themes that emphasize mutual respect and human well-being. Moral values come from different sources, including our own personal experiences, but all societies and cultures try to pass-on moral values from one generation to another through a range of institutions such as: family, religion, education and political institutions. Moral values indicate who we are,

differing from other types of values, such as social, cultural and organizational values. However, all different types of values overlap to help us develop a set of coherent beliefs that will characterize our actions, behaviors and approach to life (Podolsky O., 2008). Educational systems, mainly within European institutions, are increasingly tasked with integrating moral virtues into curricula, seeking to develop not only skilled individuals but also ethically aware and socially responsible citizens.

4. Thinkers and their contributions to the moral values integration

Important theoreticians throughout history have written about **moral values**, each from different philosophical, religious or cultural perspectives. One of them is Plato, who argued that moral values are objective and rooted in eternal forms or ideas, the form of the Good being the highest and most fundamental reality. Plato places the **form of the good** at the top of all forms, describing it as **the source of all other forms and of all knowledge and truth.** Just as the sun allows us to see physical things, the Form of the Good enables the **soul to see or understand moral truths** (Plato, 2002). Aristotle, in his turn, developed virtue ethics, believed moral values arise from cultivating virtues like courage, temperance to achieve eudaimonia or flourishing, happiness or living well. Eudaimonia is **not a passing emotion**, but a lifelong condition, a **state of being** that reflects a fully realized human life. Aristotle begins his major ethical work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, by asking: *What is the highest good for humans? And* his answer is **"The good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue in a complete life. Honour, pleasure, intellect and every virtue we do indeed choose for themselves (since we would choose each of them even if they had no good effects), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, on the assumption that through them we shall live a life of happiness; whereas happiness no one chooses for the sake of any of these nor indeed for the sake of anything else" (Aristotle, 2000).** Besides Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy I would also mention **St. Augustine** who saw moral values as grounded in the divine will of God stating that humans must align their will with God's eternal law. In the same way of religious perspective, **St. Thomas Aquinas** integrated Christian theology with Aristotelian ethics considering that moral values are part of the natural law, discoverable through reason. **The Islamic philosopher Al-Ghazali** wrote extensively on ethics within an Islamic framework, integrating reason with divine command.

The Enlightenment and Modern Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant argued that moral values are derived from reason and autonomy and he also introduced the *categorical imperative*, act only according to maxims that can be universalized. Kant characterized the *categorical imperative* as an objective, rationally necessary and unconditional principle that we must follow despite any natural desires we may have to the contrary. All specific moral requirements, according to Kant, are justified by this principle, which means that all immoral actions are irrational because they violate the *categorical imperative* (Kant, 2007). Other philosophers, such as Hobbes, Locke and Aquinas, had also argued that moral requirements are based on standards of rationality. However, these standards were either instrumental principles of rationality for satisfying one's desires, as in Hobbes, or external rational principles that are discoverable by reason, as in Locke and Aquinas (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy[, 2022]).

In relation to the 19th and early 20th century, Friedrich Nietzsche critiqued traditional morality as life-denying and introduced the concept of *master-slave morality* and called for the creation of new values. Master morality is characteristic of the strong

and powerful, valuing traits like strength, nobility and courage, while slave morality emerges from the oppressed and weak, valuing traits like humility, compassion and obedience (Nietzsche, 2002). John Rawls and Alasdair MacIntyre are two influential philosophers who approached morality and moral values from distinct perspectives, with their ideas highlighting contemporary ethical thought. Argued for justice as fairness; moral values must be agreed upon behind a "veil of ignorance" to ensure impartiality. JOHN RAWLS, IN HIS BOOK *A Theory of Justice* (1971) focuses on creating a moral framework for a just society that must ensure fairness and equality for all citizens. He introduced the idea of the **original position** and the **veil of ignorance** as tools for determining the principles of justice. The **original position** is a hypothetical situation where individuals come together to create the basic rules of society, but they do so behind a **veil of ignorance**, unaware of their own personal characteristics such as wealth, gender, race or intelligence and this ensures that the principles chosen are fair because no one can design them to benefit themselves unfairly (Rawls, 1999).

MacIntyre argues that **modern moral philosophy**, mainly following the Enlightenment has led to a fragmented and incoherent understanding of ethics. He criticizes the idea that morality can be based solely on abstract, universal principles, such as those of Kant or Rawls, or utilitarian calculations. Morality, according to MacIntyre, is **grounded in the pursuit of human** virtues like courage, honesty and temperance. He also state that individuals grow in virtue by participating in a social community with a shared history, language, and practices. Moral values are learned through **dialogue** within these communities (MacIntyre, 2007).

The modern world offers human beings a lot of different contradictory moral values and orientations. This issue is particularly important for adolescents' moral development, which is the time when they determine their own values depending on their developing world outlook. This period of personal growth, which complexity is governed by emotional, cognitive and social perspectives, is crucial for moral development (Kohlberg L., 1982).

The development of moral values begins in early childhood, but the age at which a person can meaningfully discuss and reflect on moral values varies depending on cognitive development and life experiences. In this respect we may draw a general overview of age levels when moral values are gradually developed and acknowledged. So, at the ages of 2-7 years children begin to express a sense of right and wrong, largely based on rules and expectations set by caregivers. At this stage, their understanding of morality is largely influenced by rewards and punishments (pre-conventional morality, as described by Kohlberg's stages of moral development). They might say things like "It's not nice to hit" because they've learned that hitting leads to consequences. Kohlberg grouped these stages into three broad categories of moral reasoning, pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional, each level being associated with increasingly complex stages of moral development. He suggested that people move through these stages in a fixed order and that moral understanding is linked to cognitive development (McLeod S., 2024).

We have already mentioned the first stage, and we will further refer to the second one which is middle childhood (ages 7–13, the conventional stage) when children begin to understand fairness, justice, and empathy. They are better able to consider the perspectives of others and make judgments about fairness and rules, emerging moral reasoning, and they can also begin to have simple conversations about moral values, like honesty or kindness, often tied to concrete examples. The third age situated between 12-

18 years is named post-conventional and teenagers develop more abstract moral reasoning, beginning to think about ethical principles, societal norms and the concept of justice beyond personal experiences. In this period of their lives adolescents can engage in more nuanced discussions about moral dilemmas, conflicting values, and broader ethical issues. Adults have the capacity for reflective and critical thinking about morality, influenced by culture, education and personal experiences and moral values may become deeply integrated into their identity.

Developmental science is in the middle of a context revolution, evidenced in part by recent special issues centering how culture, ethnicity and race shape young people's lives and their developmental trajectories (Cooper S., 2022). In today's most countries, adolescents rarely reach adulthood acquering only one culture and this is because they increasingly have interactions with people from diverse cultures, either firsthand or indirectly through media. Although the flow of products, people and ideas across cultures is not new, the global scope and complexity of this flow is unprecedented historically (McKenzie & Jensen, 2024). Starting from the idea that man had planted in his being, since creation, the natural moral law, the propagation of moral values should be respected and applied in all aspects. Moral values such as decency, discretion, delicacy, tenderness are almost ridiculed, by replacing them with the cult of money, of the winner, of cynical individualism and aggression, and the evolution of evil, translated as subculture, violence and rudeness is perceived as a normal phenomenon, mainly among young people alienated from religion and faith (Pruteanu G., 2007). According to many experts in the field, the educational process that occurs during enrollment in student affairs graduate preparation programs should include more elements of spiritual development, and the development of such a proficiency should occur within these programs (Chickering, Dalton, Stamm, 2006). We should know from our own experiences that moral values play a crucial role in promoting social harmony, fostering trust and enabling individuals to coexist peacefully. Of course, moral values can evolve over time. As we gain more experiences or become exposed to new cultures, mentors and philosophies, our morality will evolve. Even cultures have evolving moralities, as each successive generation is impacted by a range of new factors that shape their belief systems.

EU institutions, while respecting the autonomy of member states, promote the integration of moral values into education by fostering cooperation, providing funding and encouraging dialogue on shared European principles.

5. European Union institutional initiatives for implementing moral values support

Several European institutions and organizations focus on integrating moral values into educational systems and these institutions play fundamental roles in shaping policies, providing guidelines and promoting ethical education across Europe. The European Union has several institutions and bodies that, while not directly controlling educational systems, as education policy largely remains the competence of individual member states, influence the integration of moral values and related principles in education through policy guidance, funding and collaboration. These institutions address topics such as human rights, social inclusion and citizenship, all of which overlap with moral values. The integration process involves a reform of political and administrative institutions, a profound transformation aimed at increasing efficiency, transparency and accountability (Goudenhooft, 2024).

The European Commission plays a central role in proposing and supporting initiatives related to education and moral values and oversees programs like Erasmus+, which promote citizenship, tolerance and understanding across cultures. The Comission also develops frameworks such as the *European Education Area* (aiming to foster shared values like democracy and respect for human rights) and publishes recommendations and reports on topics such as inclusive education and the prevention of radicalization. The EEA initiative structures and fosters collaboration between Member States and stakeholders to build more resilient and inclusive national education and training systems. Education is the foundation for personal fulfilment, employability and active, responsible citizenship. It is essential to the vitality of European societies and economies. Access to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning is a right for all citizens, as enshrined within the European Pillar of Social Rights (European Commission, 2025).

The integration of moral values and spirituality into higher education may assist in the personal and educational development of both undergraduate and graduate students. John Call Dalton, an American physiologist and the first full-time professor for physiology in the United States, claims that "spirituality is especially important in the learning and experiences of college students because late adolescence is a time of heightened sensitivity about personal identity, relationships, ideology, and decisions about the future" (Dalton J., 2001).

Within the EEA working groups promote voluntary European cooperation in education and training. They offer a forum to exchange experiences and practices on addressing common challenges while respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the diversity of EU Member States. Experts work together to share information about reforms of national education and training systems policies to inspire positive change throughout the EU.

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme was launched by the European Comission in 2021 and will run for seven years until 2027. It was created along with the 2021-2027 Justice programme under the Justice, Rights and Values Fund. The CERV programme seeks to support and develop open, rights-based, democratic, equal and inclusive societies based on the rule of law. That includes a vibrant and empowered civil society, encouraging people's democratic, civic and social participation and cultivating the rich diversity of European society, based on our common values, history and memory.

In addition to all policy initiatives supported in the CERV Work Programme which include initiatives to build a Union of Equality (European Commission, 2025), the actions for 2025 support the recently adopted 'Defence of Democracy package', the EU Citizenship Package (European Commission, 2025), the Joint Communication on "No Place for Hate: a Europe united against hatred" (European Commission, 2025), the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence (European Commission, 2025) and the Recommendation on developing and strengthening integrated child protection systems in the best interests of the child (European Commission, 2025).

The European Parliament does not directly engage in programs aimed at instilling moral values in individual citizens, but it promotes ethical principles and values through legislation, policies, and initiatives that encourage member states to foster a shared commitment to fundamental values. The EP upholds the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*,* which emphasizes dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity and citizens' rights, document which underpins EU legislation and serves as a moral and legal guide for member states. Through educational and awareness campaigns the EP supports

initiatives aimed at educating citizens about democratic values, human rights and ethical principles, often in partnership with schools, universities, and NGOs. Programs such as Erasmus+ a flagship EU program that supports education, training, youth, and sport, through mobility opportunities, cultural exchanges and collaborative projects, Erasmus+ fostering understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity. The Charter also states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance (European Commission, 2025). Through initiatives like the European Youth Event (EYE), the Parliament engages directly with young people to discuss moral and social issues because these events encourage dialogue, ethical reflection and the development of solutions to societal challenges. Every two years, the EYE (European Youth Event) brings together thousands of young people from across the European Union and beyond, right at the heart of European democracy. The EYE is a unique opportunity for 16- to 30-year-olds to inspire and get inspired, to debate directly with Members of the European Parliament and other European decision-makers and to exchange views with experts, activists and content creators (European Parliament, 2025).

The Parliament addresses the challenges of the digital age by promoting media literacy and digital ethics, and in the same context educational campaigns emphasize responsible online behavior, critical thinking and combating misinformation. The European institution fosters intercultural understanding through collaborative projects between schools and organizations across member states and programs like eTwinning allow students and teachers to work on shared projects that promote mutual respect and shared moral values. The Parliament also encourages member states to adhere to its resolutions on education and training, calling for the promotion of education about climate change, gender equality and the rule of law, all of which align with broader moral imperatives.

It promotes intercultural understanding and shared values among young Europeans and at the same time the EP advocates for policies that promote equality, inclusion, and non-discrimination, addressing issues such as gender equality and the rights of minority groups. Through legislative action, it also promotes fairness in social, economic and environmental contexts.

The EP encourages active participation in democratic processes, such as voting in elections and engaging in dialogue with representatives which fosters a sense of responsibility and ethical engagement among citizens. We also know that laws passed by the EP often reflect broader moral values, such as environmental stewardship, corporate responsibility, and fair trade practices, and by setting ethical standards in areas like data privacy, labor rights, and animal welfare, the EP shapes societal norms supporting organizations as well, that work to instill ethical values, combat radicalization and promote tolerance and dialogue within communities. Instilling ethical values in teenagers is an essential part of education since it helps them develop their personalities, behaviours, and decision-making abilities. Without a question, our level of life has increased in the current materialistic society. However, it is questionable if the value of life is taken into account. Mankind has begun to travel in the wrong direction due to the explosion of the population, the explosion of knowledge (science and technology), and the development of materials (Annam, R., 2024). We conclude stating that by promoting strong principles for adolescents at an institutional level, the European Parliament influences how member states and citizens engage with moral and ethical issues in

society and seeks to cultivate a society where moral values are reflected in personal and collective actions, ensuring the long-term prosperity and cohesion of the EU.

The Council of the European Union plays a pivotal role in shaping the moral and ethical framework that guides the European Union and by encouriging cooperation among member states, the Council ensures that shared values, such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, are upheld and promoted across the EU. The Council works to uphold fundamental human rights within the EU and in its external relations. It supports policies that promote inclusion, diversity, and protection of minority groups and through its adoption of common positions, the Council ensures that EU member states align their actions with international human rights standards.

The Council plays a role in the adoption of directives and regulations aimed at reducing social inequalities, combating poverty and ensuring equal opportunities and policies on social inclusion, gender equality and workers' rights reflect the EU's commitment to ethical governance emphasising on environmental protection and sustainability showcases a moral commitment to future generations. By providing initiatives like the *European Green Deal*, it advocates for responsible stewardship of natural resources and ensures that EU policies reflect ethical responsibility on the global stage, such as advocating for climate action, equitable trade practices, and humanitarian aid. The European Green Deal is the EU's growth strategy. Launched in 2019, it consists of a package of policy initiatives, which set the EU on the path to a green transition, with the ultimate goal of reaching climate neutrality by 2050 (Melih D., 2024)**.** The Green Deal supports the transformation of the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a modern and competitive economy. Under the Green Deal, the Council, together with the European Parliament as co-legislators have adopted legislation which has turned the strategy's vision into laws and rules which are applied in all EU member states.

The Council's collective decision-making process, involving representatives from all member states, ensures a balanced approach to integrating moral values into policy and by embedding these values into the EU's legislative and diplomatic actions, the Council of the European Union significantly contributes to fostering a more ethical and equitable society both within Europe and globally.

Conclusions

After the devastation of World War II, Europe was compelled to confront not only the material destruction it had suffered, but also its profound moral failures. This reckoning gave rise to a renewed commitment to human dignity and democratic values which have since become central to the mission of European institutions. In this context, education and training emerged as vital tools for cultivating a shared moral foundation across diverse societies which led to stronger commitments to peace and reconciliation. The European Union, founded partly on moral ideals of cooperation and shared values, seeks to uphold democracy, rule of law. Europe's moral landscape is increasingly diverse due to immigration and globalization and balancing universal values with respect for cultural differences is a key challenge. During times Europe has played a multifaceted role in the evolution of moral values, from ancient philosophy and religious traditions to modern human rights and ethical frameworks which is an ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity and highlights the dynamic nature of moral development. Influence of diversity and globalization is obvious in Europe's moral landscape and a critical challenge lies in balancing universal values with respect for cultural differences.

The interplay between tradition and modernity underscores Europe's evolving moral dialogue and this analysis highlights Europe's role as a beacon of moral development while recognizing its challenges in navigating diversity and maintaining its foundational moral principles.

In light of the above, while European institutions face ongoing challenges in addressing cultural diversity, political polarization and evolving societal norms, their sustained emphasis on moral education reflects a recognition that democracy and peace cannot endure without a strong ethical foundation, and education remains a crucial space for transmitting not only knowledge, but also the values that consolidate a just and cohesive European society.

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