

THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONDITIONING OF MORAL NORMS AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF COMMON HUMAN VALUES: A DIALECTICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract. The article analyzes the relationship between the socio-historical formation of moral norms and the claim of universal importance of universal human values from a dialectical perspective. The aim of the study is to develop a conceptual approach that does not equate universality with cultural identity, without transforming historical relativity into absolute moral relativism.

Keywords: moral norm; socio-historical conditioning; common human value; normative universality; moral relativism; dialectics; human dignity; institutional mediation; reflexive universalism.

Introduction

Does the emergence of a moral norm under particular historical conditions imply that it is justified only within those conditions? Conversely, does recognizing a value as universal require it to be interpreted identically in all societies and implemented through exactly the same institutions? These questions constitute a central problem in examining the relationship among moral consciousness, social relations, and normative justification. This article examines historicity and universality not simply as mutually exclusive characteristics, but as an interrelated and mutually mediated relationship that manifests itself at different levels of analysis.

The empirical picture of the problem is not unidirectional. Based on World Values Survey data from 1981–2022, J. C. Jackson and D. Medvedev analyzed responses from 406,185 respondents across 76 country-cultures and identified tendencies toward global divergence and regional convergence in values [1]. M. Alfano, M. Cheong, and O. S. Curry, meanwhile, demonstrated through a machine-assisted analysis of ethnographic texts from 256 societies that most moral orientations associated with cooperation occur across a majority of societies [2]. The first finding does not establish the absolute distinctiveness of all moral standards, while the second does not establish that all norms are exactly the same. Their intersection highlights the need to distinguish empirical prevalence from normative justification.

In the context of Uzbekistan, the normative and legal significance of the problem is expressed in Article 13 of the Constitution, which establishes the human being, his or her life, freedom, honor, and dignity as the highest values. Article 26 stipulates that “The honor and dignity of a person are inviolable” [3, Articles 13 and 26]. These provisions constitute an explicitly articulated local normative foundation for moral evaluation in the present study. However, legal recognition and full realization in everyday practice

are not identical phenomena; their correspondence requires separate empirical investigation.

The theoretical foundation of the problem consists of philosophical positions that differ from one another. Aristotle distinguishes between the natural and conventional dimensions of political justice, while at the same time he does not reduce naturalness in human relations to simple immutability [4, Book V, Chapter 7]. K. Marx's approach to the relationship between social being and consciousness provides a methodological basis for studying moral conceptions without separating them from material life and social relations [5, "Preface"]. From these two perspectives, the analytical task is to distinguish the identification of the historical sources of a norm from the examination of its moral justification.

The aim of the study is to reconstruct dialectically the relationship among the historical genesis, normative justification, and institutional realization of moral norms and to propose a context-sensitive universalist model of evaluation. The central question is formulated as follows: how can the historical and cultural diversity of norms be justified while preserving the equal moral status of individuals? The conceptual contribution of the article lies not in proposing a general slogan reconciling historicity and universality, but in developing testable questions through which they can be distinguished and connected.

Materials and methods

The study is theoretical and conceptual in character. The source corpus includes classical philosophical texts addressing moral justification, historical conditioning, and institutional mediation; official documents concerning human rights and cultural diversity; and three cross-cultural studies published between 2024 and 2026 that are directly relevant to the topic. The selection criteria included the verifiability of primary texts, relevance to the central research question, and coverage of contrasting or complementary positions. This was a purposive selection rather than a systematic literature review covering all publications.

A historical-comparative method was used to compare the functions of the categories of naturalness, universality, freedom, and social conditioning across different theoretical approaches. Hermeneutic analysis was employed to prevent concepts from being detached from the contexts of the works in which they were developed and replaced with contemporary meanings. Accordingly, Aristotle's concept of natural justice was not equated with modern equality before the law, nor was Avlioni's concept of education equated with contemporary theories of liberal rights. A normative-argumentative method was applied to assess the consistency of the reasons supporting a norm and whether those reasons can be applied to other persons as well.

As a methodological limitation, the study recognizes that deriving a normative conclusion from descriptive data requires an additional justificatory basis. D. Hume demonstrated that the transition from statements concerning what "is" to statements



concerning what “ought to be” requires separate justification [11, T 3.1.1.27]. Accordingly, the fact that a majority approves of a particular behavior was not treated as sufficient evidence of its moral correctness. The equal moral status of individuals was not derived from statistical observation but was established as an explicitly stated normative condition of the model.

No independent survey, experiment, or statistical reanalysis was conducted in this article. Published empirical studies were used to identify the boundaries of conceptual claims; findings from different samples were not presented as a single dataset. Cases concerning higher education, mahalla communities, and digital governance are hypothetical analytical examples intended to test the internal consistency of the model rather than observations of the activities of actual organizations.

Results

The first result of the analysis is the identification of three layers in the explanation of a moral norm. Genesis refers to when and under the influence of which needs and relationships a norm emerged. Normative justification concerns why the norm ought to be followed, to whom it applies, and how it responds to objections. Institutional realization refers to how this requirement is implemented through practical procedures, organizations, incentives, and mechanisms of accountability. These layers are interconnected, but substituting one for another leads to a logical error.

For example, let us assume that a norm of providing assistance in a hypothetical community emerged under conditions of mutual dependence. This circumstance explains its genesis. However, if assistance is provided only to relatives while others with the same needs are excluded, the historical origin of the norm does not, by itself, justify such an exception. At the same time, approving the principle that assistance should be provided to everyone in need does not resolve the question of the resources and procedures through which it should be implemented. Thus, historical causation, moral justification, and institutional capacity represent three distinct questions that nevertheless need to be addressed in relation to one another.

Jackson and Medvedev examined changes over time in respondents’ value orientations, whereas Alfano and his co-authors examined moral content related to cooperation in ethnographic texts [1; 2]. Because their units of analysis are not identical, it would be unjustified to transform these findings into the opposing claims that “universality exists” or “universality does not exist.” In this article, the findings are interpreted as follows: the widespread occurrence of problems of cooperation does not necessarily entail convergence in the interpretation of specific norms, while differences in value responses do not preclude reflection on common normative standards [12]. This result does not demonstrate that education produces moral superiority or that universality belongs to any particular region. Rather, it primarily indicates the need for



caution when treating university samples as representative of humanity as a whole. Correlation should not be equated with causal influence.

Dialectical negation here does not mean eliminating every aspect of the previous norm; rather, it means separating the defensible value embedded in a norm from forms that restrict that value. For example, in a hypothetical situation where the requirement to “respect the teacher” is applied in a way that prohibits scholarly debate, an artificial opposition emerges between the value of respect and the reasoned examination of knowledge. Reconstructive justification preserves respect for the person of the teacher while rejecting the form that prohibits evidence-based criticism. As a result, continuity and renewal emerge as distinct aspects of a single process.

The model combines three theoretical functions without reducing them to a single doctrine: universalization clarifies the consistency of a norm; institutional mediation illuminates the conditions of its actual implementation; and discursive examination addresses objections raised by those affected by the norm and by those who affect others through it [6; 7; 9]. This linkage constitutes a reconstruction proposed by the present article; it does not imply that the classical authors advocated an identical position.

Table 1. Criteria for Evaluating Moral Norms within the Framework of Historically Mediated Reflexive Universalism

Criterion	Key Evaluation Question	Indicator of a Problematic Case
Human Dignity	Does the norm recognize every individual as a subject equally deserving of moral consideration??	Discrimination or treating a person merely as a means.
Reciprocity and Consistency	Does the moral basis for differentiation remain valid when individuals' positions are reversed?	Unjustified privilege or exemption for one's own group.
Inclusive Justification	Can the views and well-founded objections of affected parties be freely expressed and receive a response?	Coerced consent; exclusion of the interests of less-heard groups.
Context-Sensitive Implementation	How does the historical-cultural form realize the value, and have the available alternatives been evaluated?	Restricting equal status or denying context on the grounds of “tradition.”
Accountability and Reflexivity	Is there a procedure for reviewing consequences, taking responsibility for harm, and correcting errors?	Unverifiability of outcomes and closure of avenues for appeal.

The criteria do not compensate for one another through simple arithmetic aggregation. For example, “balancing” discrimination against higher organizational efficiency would contradict this model. At the same time, declaring every form of inconvenience to constitute a violation of dignity must itself be justified; otherwise, the criterion would become a slogan that merely terminates debate. The assessment should explicitly indicate the purpose of the norm, the necessity of the restriction, the availability of less restrictive alternatives, and who bears what kind of burden.

Discussion

The proposed approach does not reject ethical diversity. It emphasizes that an additional argument is required between the descriptive judgment that “different norms exist” and the metaethical judgment that “there is no basis whatsoever for evaluating them in relation to one another.” Nor is it appropriate to reduce all relativist positions to a single radical thesis; the critique advanced in this article is directed only at deriving the absolute impossibility of evaluation from historical difference. Otherwise, historical explanation may become a means of ignoring the objections of disadvantaged parties.

The critique of abstract universalism likewise has a clearly defined scope. The article does not reject general moral requirements; rather, it challenges the presentation of a single historical-cultural expression as their only possible form. A particular value may be justified differently across languages, worldviews, and social traditions. Rawls’s idea of an overlapping consensus within the framework of political justice helps to explore this possibility, but it cannot be extended into a ready-made global consensus on all moral questions [10].

The same distinction is necessary in the legal expression of shared values. Articles 1–2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights articulate the principles of equality in dignity and rights and non-discrimination [13]. Paragraph 5 of Part I of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action presents the universality of rights together with the need to take historical, cultural, and regional particularities into account; such particularities do not relieve states of their obligations to protect human rights [14]. UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity establishes that cultural diversity cannot be invoked to violate human rights or to limit their scope [15, Article 4].

These documents are not used in this article as independent evidence proving the metaphysical truth of universal values. Rather, they demonstrate explicitly articulated international normative forms of the relationship between universality and diversity. The existence of such declarations does not mean that all societies share identical moral views, nor does it imply that the principles established in these documents are fully implemented in practice. Distinguishing legal recognition, philosophical justification, and social implementation is therefore equally necessary at this point.

In the third hypothetical scenario concerning digital decision-making, it is assumed that an algorithm used to select students reproduces differences contained in historical data without explanation. Under the proposed model, the computational derivation of a decision is not, in itself, sufficient grounds for considering it impartial; the data, criteria, consequences for different groups, and possibility of human review must be examined. UNESCO’s Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence advances the principles of human rights, fairness, transparency, privacy, and accountability [16, Section III]. In the hypothetical scenario, the solution is to translate these principles into procedures for auditing, explanation, and raising objections.



In all three examples, the aim is not to impose exactly the same procedure on all organizations. Rather, they demonstrate how the same evaluative questions can be concretized in different contexts. The principle of human dignity enshrined in the Constitution can serve as a local normative foundation for such deliberation [3, Articles 13 and 26; 13]. However, the resources, authority, and consequences associated with each practical recommendation must be examined separately within the relevant field. The main limitations of the study are the selective nature of the source corpus, the fact that the model has not been empirically tested, and the inability of the hypothetical scenarios to fully capture the complexity of real institutional settings. Future studies could assess the comprehensibility and practical applicability of the criteria through scenario-based tasks involving different regions and social groups, interviews, and analyses of decision-making processes. In such studies, the researcher's normative position should be clearly distinguished from respondents' existing views. The proposed model is a theoretical hypothesis and an argumentative tool rather than a ready-made standard for social diagnosis.

Conclusion

The relationship between the socio-historical conditioning of moral norms and the universality of universal human values can be consistently explained by distinguishing their respective levels of analysis. Identifying the origins of a norm does not fully resolve the question of its justification; likewise, recognizing a general principle does not, by itself, determine how that principle should be implemented within a particular institution. Thus, genesis, normative justification, and institutional realization constitute distinct layers that cannot substitute for one another but must respond to one another.

The historically mediated reflexive universalism proposed in this article takes the equal moral status of human beings as a fundamental normative condition and seeks to reconcile it with historical-cultural diversity.

The theoretical contribution of the article is the development of a three-layer analytical framework and a five-criterion evaluation model. The practical proposal is to ensure open consideration of the purpose of a norm, the parties affected, the grounds for differentiation, its consequences, and procedures for review in higher education, mahalla institutions, and digital decision-making. The actual effectiveness of such procedures requires further empirical investigation. The dialectical conclusion is that universality should be understood neither as a uniformity given ready-made outside history nor as a simple aggregate of historical interests. Rather, it is reconstructed as a normative task that connects commitment to equal moral status with concrete social experience and critical justification



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