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History for Pure Life: Reviewing the Effects of World and Islamic History on Ethics


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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT	
Article History: Received: 15 February 2025 Revised: 10 April 2025 Accepted: 14 May 2025		SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES: Understanding the impact of world history on ethics is crucial for fostering global ethical discourse and navigating modern challenges with historically informed moral decisions. METHOD & FINDINGS: The study finds that world history has played a dual role in shaping ethics, reinforcing moral ideals such as justice, human rights, and compassion, while simultaneously exposing the depths of human immorality through colonialism, war, slavery, and systemic oppression. However, these opposing narratives do not exist in isolation; they interact dynamically within a continually evolving moral field. Historical events, movements, and philosophical developments have influenced and shaped ethical thought, demonstrating a reciprocal and dialectical relationship between the two domains. CONCLUSION: The paper proposes the Dialectical-Moral Field Theory of History, which reinterprets world history as a contested space where moral and immoral forces are in constant tension. This perspective moves beyond simplistic moral or cynical interpretations, emphasizing history as a site of ethical struggle and transformation. Recognizing this dynamic interplay enables a deeper understanding of the moral responsibilities we inherit and informs efforts to cultivate a more just and ethically grounded global society.	
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Introduction

The relationship between history and ethics constitutes a complex and reciprocal intellectual dynamic. While ethics concerns the moral principles governing human conduct (Hammersley, 2015; Snyder & Leffler, 2005) and history studies past events and human experiences across time (Smith, 2021), the two fields are deeply intertwined. Ethical systems evolve within the historical conditions of their emergence, reflecting transformations in culture, governance, and knowledge (Currie et al., 2021). Ancient moral codes were often rooted in religion and social hierarchy (Acharya, 2020), while the Enlightenment redirected Western ethics toward reason and individual rights (Robertson, 2020), shaping modern ideas of justice and human rights.

In interpreting the past, historians necessarily engage in ethical evaluation (Sacchi et al., 2007; Milligan et al., 2018). However, this practice involves the tension of applying contemporary values to contexts governed by different moral norms. Despite this challenge, history remains essential to ethics, providing moral perspective and informing present values. Historical traumas—such as the Holocaust—have generated enduring ethical commitments to human rights and genocide prevention (Barkan, 2009; Sacchi et al., 2007),

while movements like U.S. civil rights have expanded understandings of equality and justice. Thus, history not only situates ethics but also reshapes the moral landscapes of modernity.

Religious traditions have long linked history and morality, interpreting past events as moral lessons. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism each portray historical narratives as embodiments of virtue, vice, and divine justice. However, modern secularism treats history as an objective fact, neglecting its moral dimension. This neglect diminishes history's pedagogical power to cultivate ethical reflection. Acknowledging the moral nature of historical understanding reveals that societies' ethical fabrics are historically woven, and that moral awareness depends on critical engagement with the past.

Analyzing this interplay requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates history, philosophy, and ethics (Forsyth et al., 2008; Gorski, 2013). Historical context, philosophical reflection (Irwin, 2011; Nadel, 2018), cross-cultural comparison (Resick et al., 2006), temporal analysis (Böhm & Pfister, 2005), and distinctions between causation and correlation (Alicke et al., 2015; Cushman & Young, 2009) all contribute to understanding how moral ideas evolve. Examples include the

doctrine of just war, emerging from conflicts like the Crusades and World War II (Broussard et al., 2019), and post-Holocaust redefinitions of human rights. Cross-cultural and temporal analyses show that historical encounters and crises consistently reshape moral philosophy (Höglund, 2010; Durham, 2014).

Historical events have transformed global moral thought. The atrocities of World War II and the Holocaust prompted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Corella, 2018; Plaisance, 2005). Colonialism and its critique, articulated by figures such as Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral (Rabaka, 2022), introduced moral frameworks centered on self-determination and anti-racism. The abolition of the slave trade, championed by Wilberforce and Equiano (Equiano, 2014), reflected moral awakening through humanitarian advocacy. Contemporary climate ethics similarly derives from historical industrialization, framing sustainability as a response to past ecological harm.

Interpretations of history oscillate between moral idealism—seeing progress toward justice—and moral realism, viewing history as power-driven and amoral. A balanced view recognizes moral progress as dialectical, emerging through tension between ideals and failures. However,

scholarship on this nexus often lacks multidisciplinary, global inclusivity, and engagement with issues such as revisionism, bias, and future-oriented ethics. Addressing these gaps demands integrating moral psychology, sociology, and non-Western perspectives to form a global, historically grounded moral understanding. Ultimately, history and ethics are mutually constitutive: historical consciousness refines moral judgment, while ethical reflection gives meaning to studying the past.

The objective of this article is to examine the scientometrics of the papers that were published in the journal *"Effects of World History on Ethics,"* and it does this by providing answers to the following research question:

- How have critical events in world history influenced the development of ethical theories, moral philosophies, and ethical standards?

Conceptual Framework

1. World History

World history is an analytical approach that examines historical processes and events across global contexts, emphasizing interconnections, interactions, and patterns that transcend national or regional boundaries (Manning, 1996). Unlike traditional history, which often focuses on isolated nations or cultures, world history seeks to understand large-scale

phenomena such as trade, migration, empire, technological diffusion, and cultural exchange (Bentley, 1996). Situating events within global networks and long-term trends enables scholars to discern the structural and systemic forces shaping human societies and to consider the ethical implications of historical decisions and actions across time and space.

2. Ethics

Ethics is the philosophical study of right and wrong, focusing on principles that guide human behavior and decision-making (Wittmer, 2019). It encompasses normative theories, such as deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics, which evaluate actions, intentions, and character traits according to moral standards (Benlahcene et al. 2018). In historical inquiry, ethics involves assessing the moral responsibilities of individuals, institutions, and societies in their interactions, decisions, and legacies. It also addresses questions about justice, accountability, and the ethical use of knowledge, including historians' responsibilities in accurately and sensitively representing past events.

3. Pure Life

"Pure life" is a conceptual ideal that emphasizes living according to intrinsic moral and ethical principles, free from corruption, external coercion, or social distortion (Chegini & Pakpor, 2025). It implies a holistic

approach to existence in which personal actions, choices, and reflections align with universal ethical norms and contribute to the flourishing of self and society. In historical and philosophical reflection, pure life is often examined as a normative benchmark, guiding individuals in evaluating the moral significance of historical events and shaping the ethical dimensions of human experience.

4. Morality

Morality refers to beliefs, norms, and practices governing notions of right and wrong within a community or society (Chaddha & Agrawal, 2023). It is descriptive and prescriptive, reflecting cultural conventions while guiding human conduct toward ethical ideals. Morality is shaped by social, religious, and philosophical traditions and is closely linked to law, politics, and personal conscience (McGrath, 2022). In historical studies, understanding morality involves analyzing how societies have defined ethical behavior over time, how moral frameworks evolve, and how historical actors negotiated ethical dilemmas in diverse contexts.

5. Dialectical-Moral Field

The dialectical-moral field is a conceptual space where ethical principles and historical forces interact dynamically, producing tensions, negotiations, and transformations

(Aryal, 2025). It combines dialectical reasoning—recognizing contradictions, oppositions, and synthesis in historical processes—with moral evaluation, highlighting how ethical considerations and social constraints influence human actions. This framework allows scholars to explore the interplay between moral ideals and historical realities, showing how ethical reflection can guide historical understanding and how historical analysis can illuminate the complexities of moral decision-making in changing contexts.

Literature Review

In reviewing the effects of world history on ethics, several significant works provide foundational insights into the intersection of historical understanding and moral reflection. Kaul (2023), in *“The Lamp That Illumines the Past”: Sanskrit Kāvya and the “Writing of History in Early India”*, explores how literary and historical texts shaped ethical perspectives in early Indian culture, emphasizing historiography's role as a moral guide. Martin (2017), through *“Cinema’s Vital Histories: Wabi-Cinema, Forces and the Aesthetics of Resistance”*, investigates how historical consciousness in film can influence ethical sensibilities by presenting narratives of resistance. Svampa (2020) in *“History Between Memory and Oblivion”* examines the

tension between collective memory and historical erasure, highlighting ethical responsibilities in remembering and forgetting. Ahlskog (2019), in *“History as Self-Knowledge”*, articulates how engagement with the past fosters existential and ethical reflection. Similarly, Arend (2024) in *“History of the Present Time and Ethics”* interrogates contemporary sources, emphasizing the ethical challenges of historical interpretation. Pereira (2015) examines *“Ricoeur’s Eschatological Utopia”*, linking historical memory to ethical forgiveness. Freund (2009) and Strle (2023) emphasize oral history methodologies, exploring the moral imperatives of representing marginalized voices. Donatelli (2017) frames ethics as an ongoing philosophical conversation shaped by historical contexts. Barros (2017) addresses the historiography of values, debating the ethical significance of evaluating historical processes, while Poltronieri (2024) connects Husserlian thought with ethical reflection through historical debate.

Additionally, Hedrick Jr. (2005) investigates the ethical dimensions of world history in shaping human conduct, and Pommier (2017) considers responsibility as a bridge between historical knowledge and moral life. Collectively, these works foreground how history informs ethical

thought across philosophical, literary, and methodological domains. The pivotal differentiation of *History for Pure Life: Reviewing the Effects of World History on Ethics* lies in its integrative approach: unlike the individual disciplinary or methodological foci of prior studies, this article systematically synthesizes philosophical, historiographical, and empirical perspectives to demonstrate the direct, normative impact of global historical consciousness on contemporary ethical reasoning, bridging abstract theorization with concrete applications in life practice.

Methodology

This study aims to investigate the influence of historical events and tales on ethical cognition and moral conduct in two different contexts: The Idealist and the Critical Perspectives in the global context. A literature study, historical analysis, cross-cultural comparison, current relevance, and analytical synthesis are all pieces that are included in the technique. The analysis will provide the groundwork for understanding the development of ethical conceptions and the influence these beliefs have had on critical events. As part of the study, we will examine how historical perspectives on ethics influence modern ethical discussions and decision-making. In addition to being qualitative, the study will be comparative, emphasizing the

connections between historical processes and moral frameworks.

1. World History as a Moral Realm: The Idealist Perspective

From the standpoint of thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Leo Tolstoy, or modern cosmopolitan theorists, history reflects a gradual unfolding of moral reason and ethical consciousness (Nemeth, 2019). Kant's idea of universal history emphasizes the development of freedom and human rights through a "hidden plan of nature." For example, the abolition of slavery, the rise of human rights law, and global movements for gender equality are seen as historical milestones in humanity's ethical maturation. Though critical of political power, Tolstoy believed in a spiritual and moral arc in human affairs, driven by the ethical choices of ordinary individuals (Deligiorgi, 2006).

From the perspective of many moral philosophers, historians, and ethical humanists, world history—despite its undeniable episodes of violence and injustice—is fundamentally an arena of moral development, marked by enduring instances of self-sacrifice, peace-building, cooperation, and charity (Kleingeld, 1999). Skeptics of purely cynical or nihilistic interpretations of history argue that focusing exclusively on immorality ignores the complex and often inspiring ways human beings have

acted ethically, even under the most challenging circumstances (Popkin, 1970). This view highlights the moral capacities that have shaped and sustained human civilization.

One compelling example is the global movement to abolish slavery in the 18th and 19th centuries. While slavery itself was a moral catastrophe, the efforts of abolitionists such as William Wilberforce in Britain, Frederick Douglass in the United States, and numerous unnamed activists worldwide reveal a profound moral awakening. Their campaigns were rooted in values of human dignity, empathy, and justice, and they often involved immense personal sacrifice, such as social ostracism, imprisonment, or even death (Coffey, 2024; Butler, 2019). These actions suggest that history contains powerful moral currents that transcend self-interest and exploitation.

Another example is the development of humanitarian law and peacekeeping initiatives following World War II. Institutions such as the United Nations, the Geneva Conventions, and later peace movements were established in response to the horrors of global conflict (Sambanis, 2008). These efforts aimed to prevent future atrocities, protect civilians, and institutionalize human rights and peace principles. While imperfect, the

postwar international order reflected a conscious ethical response to historical violence, grounded in ideals of cooperation and mutual respect. Likewise, intercultural cooperation and dialogue throughout history—such as the Islamic Golden Age, in which scholars of diverse faiths collaborated on science, medicine, and philosophy—demonstrates humanity's capacity for mutual enrichment rather than domination. Cities like Baghdad and Córdoba became centers of coexistence, where Christians and Muslims studied and worked together, demonstrating that history is not solely defined by religious conflict but also by shared moral pursuits (Lapidus, 1992; Simonton, 2018).

The rise of charitable institutions and global humanitarian movements also underscores the moral dimensions of world history. Organizations such as the Red Cross, founded in the 19th century by Henri Dunant after witnessing the Battle of Solferino, represent a commitment to alleviating human suffering regardless of national or political affiliation (Hutchinson, 1989). More recently, global responses to humanitarian crises—such as aid mobilization during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the COVID-19 pandemic—reflect a continued tradition of compassion, solidarity, and moral responsibility at both grassroots

and institutional levels (Qiu & Yan, 2025).

Furthermore, movements for civil rights, women's rights, and decolonization have often been grounded in ethical frameworks emphasizing justice, equality, and human dignity. The nonviolent resistance led by Mahatma Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States are prime examples (Dikshit, 1975; Cha, 2013). Their strategies were explicitly moral, rooted in ideas of truth (satyagraha), love, and non-retaliation, and they succeeded not only in political terms but also in inspiring global moral reflection and reform. From the perspective of morally optimistic skeptics, world history is not merely a narrative of domination and immorality, but a testament to humanity's ongoing ethical striving. Through self-sacrifice, cooperation, and the pursuit of justice, individuals and communities have repeatedly demonstrated that moral values are present in history and have played a crucial role in shaping it. This view invites a balanced understanding of history that acknowledges suffering but affirms human potential for goodness.

This perspective often overlooks the complexity and contradictions within such movements. Progress usually emerges not solely from moral reasoning but through conflict,

compromise, and pragmatic interests. Furthermore, emphasizing a moral arc can obscure the voices of those left behind or harmed by the systems hailed as progressive.

2. World History as a Realm of Immorality: The Critical Perspective

In contrast, thinkers such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Michel Foucault, and Howard Zinn argue that power struggles, domination, and systemic injustice fundamentally shape history. Foucault, for example, emphasized that historical narratives are embedded in structures of knowledge and power that discipline, exclude, and control. Zinn portrayed U.S. history as a series of elite manipulations, where official morality masked economic and political exploitation (Wright, 1976; O'Farrell, 2013).

From the perspective of numerous critical and sometimes disillusioned observers, world history is often viewed not as a moral realm of human progress but rather as a long, troubling narrative of immorality, violence, and injustice (Bermudez, 2021). This view, rooted in realist, postmodern, or postcolonial critiques, suggests that history is less a testament to ethical advancement than a chronicle of exploitation, domination, and hypocrisy masked by ideological justifications. A central example often cited is the legacy of European

colonialism, which, under the guise of "civilizing missions," led to the subjugation, cultural erasure, and economic exploitation of millions across Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Critics argue that the Enlightenment values of liberty, equality, and fraternity—championed as moral advancements—were selectively applied (Pomeranz, 2005). While these ideals inspired revolutionary change in Europe, they coexisted with the brutal reality of slavery and imperial conquest abroad. This contradiction leads some to conclude that history has been shaped more by the pursuit of power than by moral principles.

Another example is the transatlantic slave trade, which lasted for centuries and was not only tolerated but institutionalized by major Western powers. From this perspective, the fact that slavery was legally sanctioned, economically motivated, and religiously justified by dominant societies demonstrates a fundamental moral failure at the core of historical development. Even the eventual abolition of slavery, critics argue, often occurred more for pragmatic or political reasons than out of genuine moral awakening (Austen, 2001).

Similarly, 20th-century global conflicts, such as the World Wars, the Cold War, and numerous proxy wars, are seen by some as reflections of moral bankruptcy rather than moral

progress. The use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia, and the U.S.-backed coups during the Cold War (e.g., in Iran, Chile, and Guatemala) reinforce the view that world history is marked by moral compromise, often justified through ideological constructs like anti-communism or national security (O'Rourke, 2020). Postcolonial theorists, such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, have emphasized how history has often been written by victors who impose their moral interpretations while silencing subaltern voices (Ambesange Praveen, 2016). From this vantage point, history is less about a neutral or morally guided record of events and more about the strategic construction of narratives that serve the interests of hegemony.

Moreover, some critics view the history of capitalism as morally suspect, arguing that global economic systems have developed through exploitation, environmental degradation, and the deepening of inequality. The Industrial Revolution, often heralded as a milestone of progress, is interpreted instead as the institutionalization of wage slavery, child labor, and unsustainable ecological harm. While mainstream narratives frequently present history as a moral evolution toward justice and the Enlightenment, many critics view

world history as fundamentally shaped by immorality, injustice, and hypocrisy (Brown, 2021; Ward, 2018). These perspectives challenge the moral triumphalism often found in historical discourse, urging a more skeptical, critical, and nuanced engagement with the past.

While this approach rightly critiques moral hypocrisy, it risks descending into moral relativism or nihilism. Focusing almost exclusively on immorality overlooks the honest and often courageous ethical resistance within historical contexts—such as abolitionists, peace activists, or truth-tellers under authoritarian regimes.

3. A New Theory: The “Dialectical-Moral Field” Theory of History

We propose a new theoretical framework to move beyond this binary: world history as a dialectical-moral field. This theory posits that history is neither inherently moral nor immoral but is a dynamic space where opposing moral forces—justice and injustice, altruism and self-interest, compassion and cruelty—constantly interact, compete, and co-define one another. In this view, morality is not an endpoint or an absence but an arena of struggle embedded within historical processes. Human agency, structures of power, cultural traditions, and existential crises continually shape moral outcomes, making history a

moral battleground rather than a linear path or a void.

The French Revolution (1789–1799) initially began as a pursuit of liberty and equality, but it ultimately produced both the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Reign of Terror. Here, moral ideals and violent excesses emerged from the same historical movement, demonstrating the interplay of liberation and authoritarianism—the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa. The ethical leadership of figures like Nelson Mandela coexisted with acts of violence on all sides. The eventual transition to democracy was not purely a moral victory or a cynical compromise, but a dialectical resolution forged in the crucible of prolonged moral and political contestation. Global Climate Agreements (e.g., the Paris Agreement of 2015): Reflect a moral recognition of planetary responsibility and ongoing failure to act decisively. History here is shaped by conflicting interests and ethical appeals to future generations and the global poor.

The Dialectical-Moral Field Theory of History posits that world history is not inherently moral or immoral but a dynamic arena in which opposing ethical forces—such as justice and injustice, altruism and self-interest, compassion and cruelty—constantly interact and shape historical outcomes through tension and struggle. Unlike

idealist views that frame history as a steady march of moral progress, or critical realist perspectives that emphasize domination and exploitation, this theory acknowledges that history is forged in moral conflict, where gains in human rights, freedom, or justice emerge not from linear advancement but from dialectical encounters between competing values, interests, and power structures. For example, the abolition of slavery was not merely a moral awakening but a product of political resistance, economic shifts, and grassroots advocacy. The French Revolution produced the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Reign of Terror, illustrating how moral ideals and violence coexist within the exact historical moment. Likewise, decolonization was driven by a moral imperative for self-determination, but often gave rise to new forms of internal repression or inequality. Even in contemporary times, responses to global crises like COVID-19 or climate change reveal this moral dialectic, where solidarity and selfishness coexist in shaping global outcomes. Thus, this theory reframes history as a contested moral terrain in which ethical progress is not guaranteed but constantly negotiated, resisted, and redefined by individuals and societies operating within complex structural conditions.

The Dialectical-Moral Field Theory reframes world history as a moral terrain of conflict and possibility, where human agency confronts structural limits, and progress is never guaranteed, but always contested. By recognizing the moral ambiguity and complexity of historical processes, this theory provides a more nuanced and actionable lens that neither glorifies nor condemns history but treats it as a dynamic moral struggle.

Conclusion

The exploration of the research questions presented in this study has yielded valuable insights into the intricate relationship between history, ethics, and collective memory, both in the context of civilizations and on a global scale. The research has demonstrated that historical narratives are crucial in shaping collective memory and influencing the ethical frameworks of contemporary societies. The interpretation of historical texts is pivotal in the evolution of moral thought in civilization, reflecting a dynamic engagement with foundational sources.

This study has demonstrated that the relationship between world history and ethics is far more intricate and dynamic than conventional binary interpretations allow. While some perspectives emphasize moral idealism—highlighting humanity's ethical progress through abolition, civil

rights, and humanitarian advances—others adopt a critical stance, underscoring history's legacy of violence, exploitation, and hypocrisy. However, though valuable, both views fall short of capturing the full moral complexity embedded in historical processes. To address these limitations, this paper proposes the Dialectical-Moral Field Theory of History, which views history not as a linear narrative of moral triumph or a catalog of immorality, but as a contested space where opposing ethical forces—justice and injustice, compassion and cruelty—interact and shape outcomes in a dialectical tension. Historical events such as the French Revolution, the anti-apartheid struggle, and climate agreements illustrate how progress emerges from this dynamic interplay rather than unidirectional moral clarity. Ultimately, history serves not simply as a reflection of morality but as a field in which moral values are continuously tested, renegotiated, and redefined. Recognizing this interplay enhances our ethical awareness in the present and empowers us to make more historically informed moral decisions, contributing to a vision of a 'Pure Life' shaped by critical engagement with the past.

Limitations and Future Research

The study of the effects of world history on ethics has limitations, including a limited scope of analysis,

subjectivity in historical interpretation, cultural and religious diversity, and temporal and geographical boundaries. The research also faces methodological challenges due to using different research methods and epistemological frameworks. Future research should expand the scope, encourage interdisciplinary approaches, strive for inclusivity, transcend temporal and geographical boundaries, develop innovative methodological approaches, explore contemporary ethical debates, and investigate the role of public history and ethics education in shaping public understanding. By addressing these limitations and pursuing suggested avenues for future research, scholars can better understand how history, particularly world history, influences ethical thought and practice.

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