

Preservation through Moral Education: Exploring Reluctance, Paradox, Challenges, and Reliance on Moral intuition for Moral Progress at Europe's Darkest Sites

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Abstract

Schinkel and de Ruyter (2017, p. 121) suggest that “that moral progress is possible is a foundational assumption of moral education.” However, moral education and education broadly in relation to genocide hasn't developed in 30 years and new paradigms are needed (Resenly and Dalbo, 2025). This work explores the negative emotionality and political anxiety associated with change and the provision of direct moral education at dark tourist sites. The work highlights an in-situ reliance on passive social learning to grapple with the enormity of Nazi genocide, necropolitical programs and the rise of the far right across Europe and the commercialisation of the Holocaust (Chen and Xu, 2020).

Through a series of elite interviews conducted at several of Europe's most recognisable Holocaust sites, data indicates that moral education isn't a part of a framework to help understand both historical and modern genocide. Moral education isn't seen as a means of offering progressive moral change and shaping thought. Moral education is deemed to have a relational link to moralizing, indoctrination and didactical overtones reflecting a normative pattern associated with Nazism itself-with this constituting a taboo. Moreover, and contradictory to the work of Sievers (2016), sites across Europe do not see themselves as moral authorities but more as facilitators of moral relativism and moral subjectivism with a reliance on Vygotskian approaches to moral development.

We argue that this approach fails to contextualise the Holocaust for visitors/tourist/and fails to frame modern genocide against that backdrop. Moreover, it points toward a broader disengagement when it comes to combating lies (Fortuin, 2022), assisting with collective prevention and presenting accurate narratives related to a normative right to life (Wilson, 2024).

Through this undertaking we reveal a significant moral paradox but advocate that visitors are actively engaged in humanistic-personalist and rationalist/Kantian ‘moral dilemmas’ pre visit, during their visit and post visit as a means of underpinning moral/socio-emotional development and dealing with ‘misleading mandates’ (Yonas and van Hover, 2024).

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